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Texts Beyond Words:
Contemplation and Practice in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta

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Texts Beyond Words:
Contemplation and Practice in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta

by

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Among Advaita Vedāntins there is a tension between those who believe texts are the ultimate authority and primary soteriological method for gaining liberation and those who advocate an independent process of meditation and self-inquiry leading to religious experience. This dissertation examines the role of Advaita's contemplation (*nididhyāsana*) as a method in which text and practice intersect. I focus on Śaṅkara, the seventh-century Advaitin, whose interpretations of Advaita have been authoritative within the tradition. This investigation examines how Śaṅkara strove to exclude contemplation from a discourse of practice while maintaining it as a part of textual study, and explores the intersections of text, contemplative practice, and liberating experience in Advaita's soteriological program. I argue that sacred texts possess a receding horizon for Śaṅkara. At first there appears to be a clean distinction between texts and contemplative practice. However, if one enters the methodology prescribed by Śaṅkara, the notion of text expands and continues to grow the deeper one studies. Sacred texts stretch beyond conventional boundaries of words, not only to encompass contemplation, but knowledge of non-duality and liberation as well. One never catches the boundary of the boundless

text. This dissertation will be of benefit to religious studies scholars seeking to understand the relationships of textual study, contemplation, and religious experience in the Indian context.

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List of Abbreviations

AU	Aitareya Upaniṣad
BG	Bhagavadgītā
bh	bhāṣya
BrSi	Brahmasiddhi
BS	Brahmasūtra
BU	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
CU	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
GK	Gaudapāda Kārika
ĪU	Īśā Upaniṣad
KeU	Kena Upaniṣad
KU	Kaṭha Upaniṣad
MāU	Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad
MU	Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad
PMS	Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtra
PU	Praśna Upaniṣad
TU	Taittirīya Upaniṣad
US	Upadeśasāhasrī (padyabandha metrical chapters)
USG	Upadeśasāhasrī (gadyabandha prose chapters)
VP	Vedānta Paribhāṣā

YS	Yoga Sūtra
YSbh	Yoga Sūtra Bhāṣā of Vyāsa

Introduction

The Central Problem

A number of religious traditions accept a dichotomy of texts and practice, which limits the study of texts to one domain and religious practice to another. Though these two domains may interact in a number of ways, they are understood as fundamentally different. This division is sometimes expressed as an ideological struggle between the religious specialist in the study of sacred texts and the religious specialist in spiritual practice. The former believes texts, when properly studied under a capable teacher, are the ultimate authority and primary soteriological method. The latter critiques texts as hollow theoretical intellectualizing and instead advocates an independent process of meditation or practice leading to religious experience. The tension between the external dependence on texts, tradition, and culture versus an internal dependence on self-inquiry, insight, and religious experience is found in some form within many traditions, such as Christian official doctrine and Christian mysticism or the Koran traditionalist and the Sufi mystic or between the Buddhist focused on interpreting the Buddha's word and the Zen Buddhist meditator. The difference between the specialist in textual study and specialist in practice alludes to a number of other dichotomies, such as the tension between knowledge and action, theory and practice, conceptual knowledge and direct experience, intellectualism and anti-intellectualism, and externalism and internalism.

The varied and complex relationships of texts and practice have led religious studies scholars to approach texts and practice in a number of ways. Sometimes the

historical record of religious practice is only found in texts; thus, texts are studied to discover practice. Others focus on the ways texts are used within practice, particularly the ways in which they are employed within ritual, mediate the sacred, or become objects of worship themselves. Other religious studies scholars make a sharp distinction between texts and practice since texts, though considered normative, are often divorced from practice. While acknowledging that texts may be used, quoted, or lend authority to practice, such scholars often assign greater weight to the forms of religious life, such as rituals, customs, art, and pilgrimage. Further, they may privilege what people actually do as constituting "religion" rather than the beliefs defined by texts. This distinction is especially relevant to the study of South Asian traditions in which the primary scholarly focus used to be on Sanskrit religious literature. In recent decades scholars have increasingly recognized that an emphasis on Sanskrit literature privileges elite brahmanical authors, and fails to include the varied expressions of local Hinduisms in the sub-continent and Hindu diaspora. However, despite this important corrective measure, we must remember that texts are not static. They continue to develop in their commentaries and interpretations, and interact with the real world of religion. The often critically viewed elite textual Sanskrit tradition is in fact, perfectly alive in religious practice. In addition, sometimes the approaches we find within traditions do not fit any neat distinction of text and practice. This is certainly true in the case of Advaita Vedānta, whose approach makes it problematic to speak of texts and practice as a simple opposition. In Advaita the domains of the text and practice categories share a complex relationship that may exclude or include the other, depending on one's perspective.

During the past fourteen centuries Advaita Vedānta has proven to be one of the most influential philosophical traditions in India. It traces its roots back to the Upaniṣads, *Bhagavadgītā*, and *Brahmasūtra*. Advaita is based on the concept of non-duality or oneness. This basically means that despite the diversity and multiplicity people perceive and take for granted, the reality of it all is undifferentiated, infinite non-duality. So even though I may take myself as an individual different from others and separate from the world around me, in reality there is no separation at all. Another way of stating this is that the individual, the universe, and *īśvara* (God) are ultimately one.

Advaita was likely systematized prior to the seventh century C.E. During this early period there were a number of competing lineages, which disagreed on important points such as the relationships between text and practice, text and mystical experience, text and liberation, and more broadly, between knowledge and action. These relationships hold a particular significance in the context of Advaita. Of primary concern is the question of the goal and finding the proper and adequate means to reach that goal. All Advaitins agree that the ultimate aim of life is liberation (*mokṣa*), freedom from the unending cycle of death and rebirth (*saṁsāra*) that is impelled by *karma*, the residual force of one's present and previous actions. Liberation occurs through the direct recognition of one's identity with *brahman*, the Advaita word for non-duality or the absolute. This is the highest good, devoid of suffering, of unequaled security, happiness, and fullness, where all dualities resolve in oneness. Despite the agreement concerning this core of belief, early Advaitins contested how text and practice interact with each other within the means to liberation. These competing ideologies arose because the

tradition itself possessed an internal tension between text and practice. This was a special problem for Śaṅkara, the great proponent of Advaita and commentator who lived circa the seventh or eighth century of the Common Era. The tension has similarly concerned Advaita Vedāntins up to the present.

The following study looks back at early Advaita literature in order to understand this tension, how it arises, and how it is addressed within the tradition. I use the lens of Advaita's contemplative practice (*nididhyāsana*), a unique method in which text and practice intersect, to address these concerns.

This dissertation is not just an exercise in Indian philosophy and textual hermeneutics. The connections between text, practice, and contemplation matter to Advaita practitioners today and are still debated. Finding solutions to the tension between text and practice continues to shape the lives of Advaita practitioners. Furthermore, Advaitin religious adepts are in turn religious leaders for the larger community, so there is no small weight in their interpretations. Traditional Advaitins such as the present Śaṅkarācāryas and other popular teachers maintain a powerful influence on contemporary Hindu ideology. Their attitudes filter down in direct and indirect ways to the wider community of monks and lay people. In addition, during the past century a number of new Advaita Vedānta traditions have arisen that understand texts and practice in ways contrary to Śaṅkara. Perhaps foremost is the neo-Vedānta of Swami Vivekananda, which emphasizes independent meditation leading to religious experience as an essential and superior method to textual study. Recently, other non-traditional neo-Advaitins, who dismiss both the study of sacred texts and practice, have

spread into the diaspora of new religious movements in North America and Europe. The diversity found in contemporary Advaita, in terms of both ideology and geography, is unparalleled in Advaita's history.

Central Questions

Some Advaitins critique textual study as a means to liberation because sacred texts lend themselves to theory and intellectualizing. Texts attempt to grasp non-duality through concepts; however, concepts are intrinsically limited to duality and unable to capture non-dual *brahman*. The non-dual *brahman* is the source of awareness, but formless and unavailable for objectification. If expertise in texts is inadequate, then the natural assumption is that texts should yield to practice of some sort. But how do classical Indian practices such as yogic meditation, prayer, or ritual lead to liberation? Are they not subject to the same problems as texts? And how can such practices grasp non-duality even if they are fundamentally different and independent of texts? Should one posit some unique experiential event produced from meditation or other practices that removes conventional limitations and obstacles obscuring non-duality, and eradicates *karma* and psychological afflictions? Early Advaita Vedāntins such as Śaṅkara were acutely aware of such questions, and carefully crafted their method and teachings to balance textual, philosophical, and practical concerns. *Nididhyāsana* is a form of contemplation comprising one essential aspect of this path.

This dissertation is an investigation of Śaṅkara's understanding of the *nididhyāsana* contemplation and the ways in which he situates it within the larger system and concerns of early Advaita Vedānta. I explain the method and function of

nididhyāsana and locate it within key aspects of Advaita's epistemology and metaphysics. I also unfold certain dilemmas and ambiguities in Śaṅkara's concept of *nididhyāsana* that point to its boundaries and possible paradoxes. These dilemmas reveal the tension between external textual study and internal meditative practice and the relationship of contemplation and liberation. They reflect conflicts over the nature of *nididhyāsana* during Śaṅkara's time period, and anticipate the later intra-Advaita discussions about contemplation that continue to this day.

The central questions of this study are:

1) How does Śaṅkara understand and define *nididhyāsana* in terms of its structure, method, and function?
2) Why and how does Śaṅkara exclude *nididhyāsana* from a discourse of action and practice and distinguish it from practices such as meditation?
3) Does Śaṅkara interpret *nididhyāsana* as dependent on the teaching of the Upaniṣads and as a mode of textual study? And if so, why?
4) Does *nididhyāsana* function as the bridge between language and immediate knowledge or as a cause for experiences of non-duality?

Through answering these questions I find that Śaṅkara's *nididhyāsana* functions as a central method and underlying piece of the Advaita puzzle. It contains and dissolves the opposing sides of various dichotomies such as internal meditative practice and external textual study, knowledge and action, theory and practice, and direct and indirect knowledge. Though Śaṅkara excludes certain types of practices such as ritual and other

actions as preliminary prerequisites, he expands the domain of textual study so that it ultimately absorbs contemplation. This move allows him to include all methods directly leading to liberation as modes of textual study. In doing so he breaks the false dilemma of studying texts verses self-inquiry, so that they come together. For him, texts expand with self-inquiry. The notion of text is much larger than what many scholars and practitioners assume when approaching the study of Advaita and has been largely misunderstood.

What is *nididhyāsana* (Contemplation)?

Nididhyāsana is a specific term interwoven with Advaita's metaphysics and textual exegesis and has no neat and tidy English translation. It is commonly mistranslated as "meditation", even though Śaṅkara makes a distinction between *nididhyāsana* and forms of meditation more common in yogic practice. The term "contemplation" is more accurate, but this term loses much in translation, often leading to false assumptions. *Nididhyāsana* is not contemplation in the sense of ruminating over something or problem-solving through a process or mental action incorporating different thoughts, variables, emotions, or deductions. It is closer to the general sense of gazing thoughtfully at something for a long time. *Nididhyāsana* is an advanced part of the study process. It occurs after a student understands the Upaniṣadic formulation of identifying oneself with non-duality, and has resolved philosophical doubts regarding this unity. It appears to be a process of intentionally remaining in an awareness of non-duality, and maintaining or repeating that knowledge to the exclusion of other thoughts and types of consciousness. This is more technically stated as continuously maintaining a flow of

remembered cognitions that hold the content of the great Upaniṣad sentences (*mahāvākyāni*) – namely those sentences that identify one's self with *brahman*.

Nididhyāsana, as a word, derives from the desiderative form of the verbal root *dhyai* (to meditate, to think about), reduplicated with the prefix *ni*.[1] It is a specific type of contemplative practice that forms the third part of a three-fold learning methodology, along with listening (*śravaṇa*) and logical reflection (*manana*). Advaita Vedāntins extract the triple process from a root passage in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.5, which occurs in the context of the Yājñavalkya and Maitreyī dialogue.[2] In response to Maitreyī's query about the means to immortality, Yājñavalkya says,

> Oh Maitreyī, the self should be seen, should be heard, should be reflected on, and should be contemplated upon. By seeing, listening, reflecting, and contemplating, all this is known.[3]

Śravaṇa is listening to the Upaniṣads as taught by a qualified teacher. It consists of exegetically investigating those texts according to specific hermeneutical methods in order to understand the primary teaching of non-duality. *Manana* consists of reflecting on those texts through forms of logical inquiry, such as inferential reasoning, that are in keeping with the teaching of the Upaniṣads. It serves to negate doubts about the possibility of non-duality, particularly when there is conflict between what is determined

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[1] In Pāṇinian grammatical terms this is described as *ni* + *dhyai* + *san* + *lyut*.

[2] This passage is repeated almost verbatim in BU 4.5.6.

[3] *ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotravyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo maitreyi*
ātmano vā are darśanena śravaṇena matyā vijñānenedaṁ sarvaṁ viditam (Translation by author here and everywhere except as otherwise noted).

The last line of BU 4.5.6 is slightly different and reads *ātmani khalv are dṛṣṭe śrute mate vijñāta idaṃ sarvaṃ viditam*.

by the Upaniṣads and by other means of knowledge. Analysis through *manana* removes doubts and strengthens the teaching of the Upaniṣads.

Despite the numerous studies on Advaita Vedānta there is still a surprising amount of ambiguity, and at times confusion, regarding the method and function of Advaita's *nididhyāsana*. This ambiguity is not limited to contemporary scholars, but was also the source of a number of intra-Advaita debates during Śaṅkara's time period and among post-Śaṅkara Advaitins. One reason for this ambiguity is the difficulty Advaita faces in articulating a form of contemplation directly contributing to the rise of self-knowledge (*ātmavidyā* or *brahmavidyā*) and liberation, while at the same time striving to exclude this contemplation from a discourse of practice.

According to Advaita, self-knowledge is not a product of any action or practice. Advaita holds that liberation is already attained. The seeking individual is already that which he or she wishes to become, namely *brahman*, the immortal, infinite, ever present, non-dual reality. However, this leads to a paradox of action and liberation. If one's self is of the nature of *brahman* and intrinsically liberated, then there is no need to engage disciplines composed of action, for they are superfluous. Furthermore, all actions, including ritual actions and meditation, cause products that are finite in breadth and transitory. A finite action cannot possibly produce an infinite result. Liberation by definition is infinite, has no end or limitation, and thus cannot be a product of action.

Yet despite these claims, the Advaitin seeker still feels incomplete and desires a dramatic change, some radical transformation or enlightenment that reflects the fact that liberation is accomplished, and thus he or she embarks on a path to gain it. Why is one

already liberated yet suffering from a lack of individual security and wholeness? And how does one engage a path for solving a problem that does not truly exist? Advaitins such as Śaṅkara untangle this dilemma by locating the fundamental problem in a discourse of ignorance and knowledge rather than actions and results. Due to a primal epistemic failure, the individual mutually superimposes the properties of the true self (*ātman*/*brahman*) with the finite individual self, resulting in a case of mistaken self-identity. Superimposition and its effects create a range of obstacles that veil one's nature as already liberated. The solution is to remove all such obstacles by recognizing superimposition, discriminating the true self from the finite self, and understanding oneself as non-dual *brahman*.

Śaṅkara's view of opposition between knowledge and ritual action is theoretically distinct from our exposition but potentially problematic nevertheless in terms of Advaita's own methodology. While distinguishing physical actions and knowledge is relatively easy, we find much more difficulty in distinguishing Advaita's knowledge-like contemplations (*nididhyāsana*) from mental actions such as meditation (*dhyāna*/*upāsanā*) and devotion (*bhakti*). This difficulty is perhaps most problematic in the case of certain forms of meditation that deal with superimposing some form or idea of non-duality or an all-pervading deity onto one's self, or taking it as one's self-concept. Śaṅkara is not always clear in making the distinction between contemplation and meditation. But I believe it is quite apparent upon looking carefully at his writing. And, indeed, for Śaṅkara and other Advaitins, there is much at stake in this distinction, for the very

possibility of liberation is compromised without the proper understanding of study and contemplation.

For Śaṅkara, self-knowledge alone is identified as liberating. Any other action may be indirectly helpful in preparing a student, but does not directly remove ignorance. Falsely attributing the status of a knowledge source to practices such as meditation or insisting they must be used in conjunction with knowledge is unacceptable to him. But Śaṅkara does accept *nididhyāsana* as a soteriological method. How does he separate *nididhyāsana* from the very criticisms he aims at meditation? Why does he embrace a form of contemplative practice, which, although directly contributing to knowledge, stands outside of the limitations of action and within the domain of the soteriological efficacy of the Upaniṣads? Does not *nididhyāsana* involve the basic paradox of doing something to accomplish what is already accomplished? Addressing these questions helps us contextualize Advaita's contemplative and meditative practices, illumines key distinctions separating *nididhyāsana* from other practices, and reveals the underlying nature of *nididhyāsana*.

Difficulties in Understanding *nididhyāsana*

Unfortunately, it is difficult to provide great detail on the contemplative process itself without reconstructive speculation. This is mostly due to the lack of details concerning instruction about the discipline or process in Śaṅkara's writing. Even though *nididhyāsana* ostensibly plays a pivotal role in Advaita praxis, detailed discussions of how to do it are mostly absent in early Advaita literature, and rare even in the most prolix

of later texts. In fact, Śaṅkara rarely provides any practical instruction. This includes yogic praxis, even though he occasionally refers to it or endorses it as helpful in the study process. It was probably the case that among Advaita practitioners, yoga teachings, such as those in the *Bhagavadgītā* were well known, assumed by everyone, and to a great extent practiced. The lack of instructional details is common in some early Indian commentarial traditions and the *śāstra* genre, sacred literature dealing with specialized traditions of learning. *Śāstra*, along with its commentaries, often does not give detailed instructions for practice and assumes that the teacher provides instruction.

To complicate matters, I suspect that Śaṅkara had difficulty placing ideas about *nididhyāsana* and other practices seamlessly into his epistemology and broader philosophical views. A closer study of *nididhyāsana* reveals a number of conundrums regarding the way it functions, its stages in the study process, whether it leads gradually to clarity or to a sudden liberating cognition, and whether it is still necessary after such a cognition. Śaṅkara himself does not address such potential inconsistencies. In fact his writing does not provide us with a totally systematic philosophical system in which he lays everything out clearly. This may be because most of his writing, with the exception of the *Upadeśasāhasrī*, is commentarial and constrained to the ideas in the texts. Even in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*, which contains the bulk of his more technical writing, his intention is not to establish a philosophical system but to establish the thesis of non-duality as the primary intention of the statements of the Upaniṣads and to defend that thesis against contending theses of contemporaneous traditions. In addition, Śaṅkara intentionally leaves a number of important philosophical questions unanswered, perhaps

because he was more concerned about teaching students then getting bogged down in establishing Advaita's philosophical coherence. He may have believed such questions would only lead to pedantic quibbling and lack any fruitful result.

In addition, certain paradoxes and ambiguities seem intrinsic to Advaita's concept of liberation. For example, we encounter the following paradox similar to Meno's paradox: the unknown cannot be contemplated and the known need not be contemplated. How can one do *nididhyāsana* on the Upaniṣadic sentence meanings if the sentences and the *ātman* are not understood? And if *ātman* is already known from the Upaniṣads then why bother with *nididhyāsana*? If the sentence meanings are understood, then there should be direct non-propositional *brahmavidyā* without doubts because Śaṅkara holds the positions of intrinsic veridicality (*svaprāmāṇya*) and self-luminosity (*svaprakāśatva*). Can the *ātman* be partially known, or known and unknown at the same time?

Non-duality is a unique subject matter that resists any clear categorization such as "subject" and "object", or "knower" and "known". Even though Advaitins sometimes characterize liberation as a liberating cognition of non-duality, it is difficult to say what this cognition is and how it functions. There is metaphysical uncertainty about it, for on the one hand a cognition may be able to remove ignorance, but on the other it is problematic to reduce liberation to a cognition which exists as a product and is an event happening in time. Furthermore, Advaitins identify self-knowledge with non-duality, as indeterminable, and not subject to verbalization and objectification. It is not a new experience because it is of the nature of one's already present, intrinsically reflexive self. Therefore it does not lend itself to objectification, apperception, or post-knowledge

retrospective description. If *nididhyāsana* is the penultimate precursor to this knowledge, or even identified as this knowledge, then the concept of it may share some of the same obscurities as the concepts of self-knowledge and *brahman*. Thus articulating a contemplative process that maintains or cultivates self-knowledge or removes obstructions to such self-knowledge is difficult at best. Yet ironically, in a sense language also provides the most important key for understanding *nididhyāsana*; for Śaṅkara holds the counter-intuitive position that the words in the Upaniṣads, when engaged according to particular methods, are the means for recognizing *brahman*.

Studying the Upaniṣadic texts and understanding their meaning comprises the core of Śaṅkara's soteriological strategy and is the basis for *nididhyāsana*. This requires a strong element of trust in those sacred texts. Yet an Advaitin may question whether such sacred texts truly possess the independent power to reveal *brahman*. Knowledge derived from textual study often appears indirect and theoretical, irreparably distant from direct self-knowledge. And indeed, many Advaitins questioned whether they could be freed from *saṁsāra* merely through understanding textual passages. Listening and reading just do not seem like they are enough for the lofty goal of liberation. This doubt led some Advaitins to emphasize the importance of contemplative practice or to embrace certain forms of meditation as methods necessary for gaining wisdom beyond textual study and scholarly intellectualizing. Some early Advaitins viewed *nididhyāsana* as a direct, internal method for liberation independent of or even antithetical to textual study, a position not shared by Śaṅkara. In their opinion, such forms of contemplation are a necessity, as much as or more so than textual study, for the Advaita seeker engaged in a

deep spiritual practice and working towards a life-transforming realization in the form of a mystical experience of non-duality.

It is within this philosophical milieu, where Vedāntins vociferously contested the relationships of textual study, spiritual practice, and liberation, that Śaṅkara crafted his methodology based on his understanding of the Upaniṣads. Śaṅkara recognized that listening is not always enough and accepted additional contemplative practice by expanding his notion of textual study to include contemplation. Though he focused on textual study through listening, reading, and logical reflection, he incorporated *nididhyāsana* as a method to internalize the external structure and content of sacred texts. This inclusive move preemptively avoids the conflict of pitting contemplation against textual study.

In addition, the boundaries between textual study and meditative practice or between rationality and spirituality become blurred in the case of Śaṅkara's understanding of *nididhyāsana*. This is a balancing act where even though *nididhyāsana* possesses a deep structural grammar dependent on language, textual study, and logical inquiry, it simultaneously holds a space which is non-verbal and not rational or beyond rational. *Nididhyāsana* becomes a bridge through which one finds that the distinction of indirect textual knowledge and immediate liberating experience of non-duality is simply an appearance and not reality. It is a nexus for diverse elements of Advaita's method and metaphysics, and a transition area between the clear methods of textual study and the indeterminable nature of liberating knowledge. Ultimately the practice of *nididhyāsana* allows one to become comfortable and rooted in self-evident and self-certifying

knowledge of non-duality, at which point one's knowledge does not depend on anything else, including the source of that knowledge, the Upaniṣads. With this knowledge, the Advaitin becomes liberated while living (*jīvanmukta*).

Methodology

The bulk of my research centers on Ādi Śaṅkarācārya. His commentaries on the Upaniṣads, *Bhagavadgītā*, and *Brahmasūtra* comprise a fundamental stock of ideas from which the later Advaita tradition would draw and attempt to clarify. In addition, he established monastic centers (*maṭha*s), which continue to play an important role among Advaitins and the wider community of Hindus in modern-day India. This dissertation is primarily philological in orientation in that it deals with texts and their interpretation. It attempts to understand Śaṅkara in his own traditional context through careful studies of his writing. I trace and outline a synchronic view of his theories and reveal the intersections of his philosophical, exegetical, and pedagogical programs by investigating the textual developments in his commentaries. These commentaries include those on the ten principal Upaniṣads, the *Brahmasūtra*, and the *Bhagavadgītā* as well as the non-commentarial text, the *Upadeśasāhasrī*.[4] I have avoided using some other texts, such as the *Vivekacūḍāmanī* or *Aparokṣānubhūti,* which, although attributed to Śaṅkara, are most likely of later origin. I also do not draw upon the *Yogasūtrabhāṣyavivaraṇa* because there is not enough evidence to judge it as an authentic work of Śaṅkara. My analysis is restricted primarily to the commentarial tradition in an effort to retrieve the voice and arguments of Śaṅkara accurately without projecting decontextualized interpretations or

superimposing the ideas of later Advaitins anachronistically onto Śaṅkara, a tendency vitiating many studies. However, in situations where Śaṅkara is difficult to comprehend, I have depended on traditional responses and interpretations in certain sub-commentaries.

In addition to study of the texts, I have conducted extensive fieldwork in India with contemporary Advaitin practitioners, particularly senior Advaitin monks of the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam. They provided a wealth of information through classes and discussion, and led me through some of the intricacies of Advaita theory. Though for the most part I am not analyzing practices of contemporary Advaitins, interpretations cultivated through a lifetime of dedicated study on the part of my teachers inform my work and help me to appreciate nuances that I could not have achieved on my own.

Implicit to this endeavor, which attempts to find order in the often digressive prose of Śaṅkara, is the assumption that his views are coherent. His ideas and language are at least for the most part consistent throughout his writing. The assumption of coherence also implies that I do not assume an evolution of ideas based on a chronology of Śaṅkara's writing, partly because there is not enough credible evidence to determine textual chronology and also because the degree to which Śaṅkara was an innovator or founder is questionable. He may be personally responsible for systematizing Advaita to some extent, but it is quite likely that his interpretations and methods came down to him through a teaching lineage. Furthermore, much of his doctrine is quite similar to that of his contemporary, Maṇḍana Miśra, who appears to be from a separate lineage. This supports the theory of a broadly accepted system among Advaitins in place by Śaṅkara's

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[4] See Hacker 1995, pp.41-56 for a discussion of Śaṅkara's authorship.

time despite their differences. Of course there are a number of apparent inconsistencies, ambiguities, and unanswered questions in Śaṅkara's writing, which makes him at times enigmatic. Śaṅkara was most likely aware of at least many of these tensions and issues in the context of *nididhyāsana*. He consciously and carefully chose where to target his explanations and when to gloss over issues or to remain silent. What lies unanswered yet available between the lines of the text is part of what inspires studies such as this one to take a fresh look at Śaṅkara.

With these resources, I try to tease out Śaṅkara's primary views about *nididhyāsana* and to situate *nididhyāsana* in the broader context of Advaita philosophy. I explain the epistemological underpinnings of *nididhyāsana* and demonstrate how Śaṅkara strove to exclude it from a discourse of practice. This dissertation illumines the ways in which Śaṅkara attempts to weave the threads of contemplative practice coherently into a soteriological project. It explains the delicate balancing act of defining *nididhyāsana* in relation to texts and practice, and the ways in which *nididhyāsana* attempts to embrace or resolve the contradictory propositions of Advaita's soteriological paradoxes. Unraveling these threads facilitates understanding *nididhyāsana* with its rich complexity, provides a window into the nature of non-duality according to Advaita, and more broadly contextualizes the relationship of sacred texts, religious practice, and religious experience in Advaita Vedānta and Śaṅkara in particular.

This dissertation is written especially for scholars interested in Advaita Vedānta and classical Indian philosophy more broadly. However, even though aspects of my work are rather technical, I believe it will be of benefit to religious studies scholars

seeking to understand the relationships of textual study, contemplation, and religious experience in the Indian context. In addition, *nididhyāsana* is a crucial topic of study not clearly understood by many in contemporary Advaita traditions. This study is potentially useful for people who try to live according to the teachings of Śaṅkara and to their understanding of their contemplative processes and practices.

What this Dissertation is not about

Please note that my intention is not to judge absolute truth and falsity, for I shall not argue for the validity of Advaita's claims, or its presuppositions, such as the possibility of the truth or reality of non-duality, the intrinsic reflexivity of awareness, or the infallibility of the Upaniṣads. However, I do try to find the positions closest to what Śaṅkara intends, and I favor certain positions with regard to contemplation based on their coherence with wider Advaita philosophy as shown by later commentators as well as modern scholars. My work, while critical, is sympathetic to much in Advaita traditions in that my analyses are contextualized by Advaita's own philosophical and textual parameters and I assume that the Advaita worldview is coherent overall, though like all worldviews it has its obscurities (perhaps fewer, I shall show, than is sometimes thought). Some of these obscurities, such as the nature of brahmavidyā, the fact that liberation is the end of a process yet already accomplished, and how exactly the Advaitin can transition from understanding awareness to identifying that awareness with the world, are central conflicts in the context of contemplative practice. Such issues may be unresolvable conceptual knots in Śaṅkara's writing and this dissertation does not solve and unify all of them.

Though my work deals with the philosophical history of early Advaita, it does not analyze the socio-historical context and political forces that influenced the discussions in the commentarial texts. Advaita is on one hand an orthodox brahmanical tradition, which upholds elements of brahmanical religious practice, defends the authority of Vedic texts, and criticizes those who do not accept brahmanism. On the other hand, Advaita is a radical tradition, whose textual interpretations challenged and altered mainstream brahmanical ideology. Advaitins critique some fundamental brahmanical axioms such as the importance of ritual, being a householder, and seeking a heavenly afterlife. They are instead clearly in favor of renunciation, asceticism, forms of yogic praxis, and an uncompromising inquiry into the nature of self. These positions indicate a political and social background importantly contextualizing Śaṅkara's writing. Philosophical thought does not exist in a vacuum and texts are written for a number of reasons. We cannot discount the political or social advantages in terms of power and hierarchy that an author gains by writing a text. I recognize that such issues may be quite significant for better understanding Śaṅkara. However, reconstructing sociological and political forces of Śaṅkara's culture cannot but be mainly speculative. Scholarship concerning the history of classical Indian culture and subcultures such as Advaita is not advanced. There is also much debate over dating Śaṅkara and it is unknown where he spent the majority of his adult life. Therefore I have left such concerns aside in order to focus on doctrinal issues.

There is much more research to be conducted on Advaita's *nididhyāsana* not included in this study. A vast amount of post-Śaṅkara Advaita literature, which possesses valuable theories on *nididhyāsana* built upon Śaṅkara's system, remains

untapped. Many of the debates about *nididhyāsana* and its relationship to textual study and immediate self-knowledge are found in the writing of Śaṅkara's direct disciples, Padmapāda and Sureśvara. Padmapāda in his *Pañcapādikā* and Sureśvara in his *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi*, *Taittirīyopaniṣadbhāṣyavārttikām*, and the voluminous *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣyavārtikam*, wrote extensively on *nididhyāsana*. During the 9th to 11th centuries, intra-Advaita differences and controversies arose over contemplation between the Bhāmatī school of Vacaspatimiśra and the Vivaraṇa school of Prakāśātman. From the 11th century onwards a highly technical body of literature arose largely due to the influence of other philosophies. In order to defend themselves, Advaitins borrowed the very dialectical methods used by traditions harshly critical of Advaita, such as Navya Nyāya, Viṣiśtādvaita, and Dvaita Vedānta. These Advaitins sought to clarify philosophical concepts and to systematize Śaṅkara's thinking into a tightly coherent system impervious to philosophical attacks. Complex theories plumbing the depths of epistemology arose, tit for tat, out of scholastic polemics in sub-commentaries and texts such as Sarvajñātman's *Saṅkṣepaśārīraka*, Citsukha's *Tattvapradīpikā,* Srīharśa's *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*, Madhusūdhana's *Advaitasiddhi*, Appayya Dīkṣita's *Siddhāntaleśasaṅgraha*, and Dharmarāja's *Vedāntaparibhāṣā,* to name only the most well-known. In the middle of this time period we also find more practical, pedagogical texts such as Vidyāraṇya's *Jīvanmuktiviveka*, which reveal a philosophical and social movement incorporating theories of Yoga into contemplative Advaita practice. All of these Advaita texts claim allegiance to Śaṅkara and are indeed dependent on him.

During the past two centuries Advaita has undergone perhaps its most radical changes through the advent of Vivekananda's neo-Vedānta with its emphasis on multiple paths to liberation, universal inclusivism, and mystical experience. More recently, semi-traditional yet innovative Advaita traditions such as Swami Chinmaya's Chinmaya Mission, non-traditional lineages such as that of Ramana Maharshi, and theistic Vedānta traditions that espouse some thesis of non-duality have grown in numbers. In addition, there is a proliferation of popular new religious movements espousing forms of non-duality that incorporate Advaita teachings though in a decontexualized manner apart from traditional lineages. Amidst all these voices the Advaita tradition is thriving, and I hope to present here at least a little of the philosophical and methodological developments regarding contemplation and textual study in contemporary Advaita, which, I claim scholars should not neglect.

All historical layers of Advaita deserve further research and need to be understood in order to have a complete view of *nididhyāsana* in its various contexts. In addition, there is comparative work to be done with other Indian philosophies that endorse forms of contemplative practice, and also room to bring in fresh philosophical lenses, both Indian and non-Indian, to Advaita's understanding of contemplation in order to maximize objectivity. However, it is necessary to understand Śaṅkara in his immediate philosophical and religious context before moving to the more technical later texts, to the living Advaita tradition, or to comparative studies. Indeed, Śaṅkara anticipated many of the arguments that arrive in the later tradition. One goal of my work is to explain the basis for these later arguments in the context of Śaṅkara by examining how he understood

and anticipated them, and either answered them or purposely left them ambiguous. This dissertation seeks a foundation – a coherent worldview – grounded in the source texts as a starting point for future research.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter offers an overview of Advaita metaphysics. It introduces the reader to Advaita's basic doctrines such as the problem of ignorance and superimposition and the need for liberation. It goes on to explain the nature of *brahman* as undifferentiated existence, pure irreducible awareness, and infinite fullness. An important emphasis of this overview is the nature of *brahman* as self-luminous awareness underlying each and every individual experience and witnessing all cognition. This doctrine is key to understanding Advaita on contemplation and the means for identifying oneself as non-dual *brahman*. In addition, the chapter includes brief explanations of the distinction of absolute and conventional reality and the ontological status of the world as dependent on *brahman* according to mainstream Advaita expositions.

The second chapter explains the opposition of knowledge and action, which gives rise to a false dilemma generating much of the confusion surrounding *nididhyāsana*. The chapter first unfolds the historical context of this false dichotomy in early ritual philosophy. It moves on to address Śaṅkara's interest in contrasting Advaita with the ritual tradition by refuting the notion of action as a source of self-knowledge. Despite this refutation of the action thesis, Śaṅkara endorses various actions and practices, such as meditation, as foundational to the Advaita pursuit. I explain these practices and their

importance for preparing the student for recognizing non-duality by cultivating mental purity, a key qualification for contemplation and self-knowledge. The remainder of the chapter compares and contrasts *nididhyāsana* with other meditative and contemplative practices. It provides an extensive comparison of contemplation with meditation known as *upāsanā*, a practice that appears strikingly close to *nididhyāsana*. It then takes up the question of the nature of *prasaṅkhyāna*, a form of contemplation that has led to vociferous debates among Advaita lineages. This section overviews the *prasaṅkhyāna* contemplation disputes and examines whether it is compatible with *nididhyāsana* or not. It deals extensively with Śaṅkara's older contemporary, Maṇḍanamiśra, who promoted a variation of the *prasaṅkhyāna* contemplation in his text, the *Brahmasiddhi*. It then closely probes Śaṅkara's rejection of the *prasaṅkhyāna* contemplation in his *Upadeśasāhasrī* and compares and contrasts Śaṅkara's views with Maṇḍanamiśra's.

The third chapter moves on to the importance of verbal testimony and textual study for Śaṅkara. It begins with a discussion of the difficulty of identifying different types of knowledge in Śaṅkara's thought and proceeds to disuss theory and practice, and the orientation and way in which Śaṅkara believes one should properly approach textual study in order to avoid action. The chapter then moves to a discussion of the different sources of knowledge accepted by Advaita and why Advaitins claim that the Upaniṣads are the only source of knowledge for knowing *brahman*. The fourth section explains the fundamental exegetical and pedagogical methods Śaṅkara employs for interpreting sacred texts through case studies of Upaniṣadic passages. These methods, which are also primary means in the process of contemplation, include concepts of negative language

(*neti neti*), secondary implication (*lakṣaṇā*), and continuity (*anvaya*) and discontinuity (*vyatireka*).

The fourth chapter examines the method of *nididhyāsana*. It first analyzes the root text for *nididhyāsana* (BU 2.4.5). It then studies contemplative methods found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the *Upadeśasāhasrī*, the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, and the *Bhagavadgītā* and Śaṅkara's corresponding interpretations of these passages.

The fifth chapter attempts to reconstruct the method of *nididhyāsana* by interweaving my own speculation based on the case studies in chapter four and my fieldwork with contemporary Advaitins. This chapter also demonstrates how the contemplative process is intimately connected to Śaṅkara's exegetical strategies explained in chapter three, so much so that *nididhyāsana* can be understood as a mode of textual study clearly dependent on texts. At the same time, even though *nididhyāsana* is dependent on texts for its, as I say, contemplative grammar, I discuss how texts are supposed to become transparent when one becomes fluent in *nididhyāsana*. This allows Śaṅkara's *nididhyāsana* to be dependent on texts yet simultaneously appear to transcend texts and be independent of textual study. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the concepts of repetition and the continuous flow of knowledge inherent to the practice of *nididhyāsana*.

Chapter five continues with an analysis of the function of *nididhyāsana* according to Śaṅkara and his followers. The chapter focuses on the relationship of *nididhyāsana* and liberation, questioning whether *nididhyāsana* is to be the bridge between indirect textual knowledge and direct experience of *brahman*. The discussion questions and

dismisses a false distinction of indirect and direct knowledge as incompatible with Śaṅkara's theory of knowledge. It goes on to show devastating problems in projecting ideas of mystical experience onto Śaṅkara's Advaita teaching. The function of *nididhyāsana* is significantly streamlined through an interpretation that dismisses the importance of mystical experience as well as the notions of indirect and direct knowledge.

The concluding sections of the chapter discuss the primary aim of *nididhyāsana* as removing habitual reflexive and reactive thought patterns (*saṁskāra* or *viparītabhāvanā*) formed by previous conditioned beliefs of oneself as finite, limited, and intrinsically separated from the surrounding world. These thought patterns are a unique class of obstacles that reinforce notions of duality or limited self-identities and disturb one's understanding of non-duality. The Advaitin becomes liberated while living when his or her recognition of *brahman* becomes clear and stable through the adequate removal of these obstacles.

In the conclusion I first provide a summary of the major findings and the positions taken in the preceding chapters with a particular focus on the complex relationship between texts and *nididhyāsana*. Based on these conclusions, I theorize that for Śaṅkara, sacred texts possess a receding horizon. At first there appears to be a clean distinction between texts and contemplative practice. However, if one enters into the methodology prescribed by Śaṅkara, the notion of text expands and continues to grow the deeper one studies. Sacred texts stretch beyond conventional boundaries of words, not only to

encompass contemplation, but knowledge of non-duality and liberation as well. One never catches the boundary of the boundless text.

Chapter 1: An Overview of Advaita Vedānta

1.1: The Fundamental Problem:

Advaita Vedānta is traditionally viewed as a body of knowledge and teaching methodology leading to liberation. The teacher (*guru)*, well versed in Advaita literature, employs the proper methods to reveal the wisdom of the Upaniṣads to the student (*śiṣya*). The subject matter of Advaita deals with the relationship between the individual, the universe, god (*īśvara*), and *brahman*. *Brahman* is the self and substrate non-dual reality comprising the other three terms. The fundamental thrust of Advaita is that the self is alone the totality of our existence. It is one without a second (*advaita*), non-dual, infinite existence, pure awareness, and fullness (*saccidānanda*). Advaita considers the perceived universe to be an apparent and dependent (*mithyā*) reality known as *māyā*. It is projected by the self, sustained by the self, and resolved into the self. The Advaita concept of *īśvara* is the self plus *māyā*, or alternatively, *brahman* viewed as the universe with all its attributes. The key teaching of Advaita is that the reality of *īśvara*, which is *brahman*, and the reality of the limitless universe, are one and the same as the underlying self of the individual (*jīva*). Therefore the self of the individual also, is limitless and has no beginning or end. The Advaita teaching method and the students process of self-inquiry are designed to reveal knowledge of one's self as *brahman*, the infinite non-dual substratum and being of the universe.

One simple analogy that is particularly useful for summarizing the relationship of the individual to *brahman* and *īśvara* and a presupposed identity of cause and effect is the

wave and ocean.[5] The virtually infinite waves, ripples, foam, bubbles, etc., make up the vast ocean. These forms maintain their individuality with reference to each other, but ultimately the reality, or essence, of both the wave and the ocean is simply water. In this analogy the individual wave represents the individual person. The ocean, which contains the totality of names and forms, represents *īśvara*. And the water making up the forms represents *brahman*. Just as the virtually infinite water is the content, or self, of the waves and the entire ocean, so too is the infinite and formless *brahman* the self of *īśvara* and the individual, and the essential being of all the objects within the universe. A division of wave and ocean exists from individual standpoints, but resolves from the standpoint of water. Similarly, the experiencer and objects of experience remain in conventional discourse, but such dualities dissolve from the standpoint of the one, all pervasive *brahman*.

One may well question that even though non-duality is an interesting and perhaps appealing concept, why is knowledge of non-duality important? For Advaitins there is a practical and essential goal in mind beyond speculative philosophizing. Like many other Indian philosophers, they observed a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction among individuals. That is not to say that people are basically unhappy or that life is simply suffering. People have ups and downs and some are fortunate to have a great deal of happiness in their lives. But the Advaitin argues that even if a person has everything he or she can imagine, such as health, prosperity, family, accomplishment, fame, and

[5] Śaṇkara uses variations of this analogy in numerous places. See BSbh 2.1.13, BUbh 1.4.7, 3.5.1, US prose 1.19, and CUbh 8.14.1.

respect, he or she still has a sense of being unfulfilled. This may manifest as insecurity, fear, inadequacy, a sense of smallness, or in a variety of other ways. That sense of unfulfillment will, at the least, reside in the back of one's mind as a gnawing silent presence or perhaps it will be experienced consciously and painfully.

People are able to recognize this dissatisfaction in one form or another upon inquiry because they spend all their effort for accomplishments such as security, wealth, and pleasure in order to quell their unhappiness. It is always gaining the next accomplishment that people believe will solve their fundamental problem. Yet even after gaining what is coveted there will still be a next thing that they desire to fill their emptiness, and one more after that, a series extending indefinitely. Unfortunately, gaining objects that offer security and pleasure provide a temporary release at most, while failing to provide any lasting solution. All of these pursuits are the result of a desire to change and to reach wholeness, yet such means are not capable of reaching that goal and the inability to find satisfaction causes suffering according to Advaita. And indeed, recognizing the inadequacy of these means and ends does drive people to approach traditions such as Advaita to find a means to discover wholeness and happiness.

Advaita does not claim that suffering is the cause of the problem, but rather that suffering is a symptom caused by a fundamental epistemic failure, namely self-ignorance. Self-ignorance (*avidyā*), which is beginningless and uncaused, produces a mistaken superimposition of the true self, *brahman*, onto the mind and body. Due to this erroneous cognition, the mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) unwittingly assumes that the undifferentiated being and pure awareness of the infinite self belong to it. This superimposition (*adhyāsa*) is

mutual and symetric, occurring in both directions. Not only are the intrinsic properties of the *ātman* superimposed onto the mind, but the finite and limited properties of the mind are also superimposed onto the *ātman*. In Śaṅkara's introduction to the *Brahmasūtra,* aptly named the *adhyāsa bhāṣā* (commentary on superimposition), he writes,

> [O]ne first superimposes the internal organ [mind], possessed of the idea of ego, on the self, the witness of all the manifestations of that organ; then by an opposite process, one superimposes on the internal organ etc. that self which is opposed to the non self and which is the witness of everything. Thus occurs this superimposition that has neither beginning nor end but flows on eternally, that appears as the manifested universe and its apprehension, that conjures up agentship and enjoyership, and that is perceived by all persons.[6]

People mistakenly believe that the mind is the ground from which consciousness springs. The consciousness that is *ātman* is seemingly reflected in the mind, identified with, and assumed to be the individual (*jīva*). The mistake of identifying the mind and all its modes as the self extends to the physical body, which is intimately connected to the mind, so that one's self-identity includes the mind-body apparatus. Śaṅkara details this superimposition in his commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.1.20:

> Similarly this individual self, which is of the same category as the Supreme self, being separated from It like a spark of fire and so on, has penetrated this wilderness of the body, organs, etc., and, although really transcendent, takes on the attributes of the latter, which are relative, and thinks that it is this aggregate of the body and organs, that is lean or stout, happy or miserable-for it does not know that it is the Supreme self.[7]

The stock Advaita analogy for superimposition is the perceptual error of mistaking a rope for a snake. The properties of the snake are projected on to the rope

[6] Gambhirananda 1996, p. 6.

while simultaneously veiling the true properties of the rope. Another analogy employed to explain the misidentification of the mind with *brahman* is a red hot iron ball. When immersed in a fire the iron ball appears to be a fireball. What appears to be one entity is really two, the fire and the iron ball. The attributes of fire and iron will be mutually superimposed if one does not know the difference between them. Another analogy is the translucent crystal, which is mistaken to be red when a rose is placed behind it, just as the self is mistaken to be the body.

> Just as before the perception of distinction, the transparent whiteness, constituting the real nature of the crystal, remains indistinguishable, as it were, from red, blue, and other conditioning factors; but after the perception of distinction through the valid means of knowledge, the crystal in its latter state is said to attain its true nature of whiteness and transparence…[8]

Mistaken attributes such as the color red in the analogy of the crystal are akin to the individual mind and body assumed to be the self. The body, mind, and their various modes are limiting conditions or adjuncts (*upādhi*) that circumscribe individuation. The finite body and ever fluctuating mind with which we identify with as the self has intrinsic limitations, and these limitations, based on a assumption of duality cultivate fear.[9] Due to these limitations the individual constantly strives to reach wholeness, a desire based in ignorance because the true nature of each person is infinite, and nothing else is required for that which is infinite. Unaware of this mistake, the individual desires and pursues various goals and physical objects. The solution to this fundamental problem, says the

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[7] Madhavananda 1993, p. 211.
[8] BSbh 1.3.19. Gambhirananda 1996, p. 193.

Advaitin, is to understand one's self through recognizing *brahman*, the Upaniṣadic formulation of ultimate truth and Advaita's principle of non-duality. When there is no more duality then there is no possibility of fear.[10] A popular definition of *brahman* among post-Śaṅkara Advaitins defines it as existence/truth (*sat*), awareness/consciousness (*cit*) and wholeness/absolute happiness (*ānanda*).

1.2: *Brahman* as Existence:

Advaita states that *brahman* is undifferentiated singular existence, the sole reality, and the substrate ground or essence of everything. It is non-dual, unchanging, infinite, and eternal. These definitions of *brahman* are dependent on Advaita's specific understanding of what is real (*satyam*), non-existent (*tūccham*), and apparent (*mithyā*). The Advaita criterion for something to be absolutely real is that it must exist in all three periods of time, past, present, and future. If something that originates was formerly non-existent and goes into non-existence then it cannot be truly existent in the middle, just like a dream or a mirage. For example, Gaudapāda states,

> That which does not exist in the beginning and the end is equally so in the present (i.e. in the middle). Though they are on the same footing with the unreal, yet they are seen as though real.[11]

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[9] TU 2.7.1, "When a man creates a hollow or a fissure within it, then he experiences fear" (Olivelle 1996, p. 188).

[10] "That first being became afraid; therefore, one becomes afraid when one is alone. Then he thought to himself" 'Of what should I be afraid, when there is no one but me?' So his fear left him, for what was he going to be afraid of? One is, after all, afraid of another" (BU 1.4.2. Olivelle 1996, p. 13).

[11] GK 2.6. Gambhirananda 1992, p. 231.
In TUbh 2.1.1, Śaṅkara writes that a thing is real when "it does not change the nature that is ascertained to be its own; and a thing is said to be unreal when it changes the nature that is ascertained to be its own" (Gambhirananda 1992, pp. 308-9).

What is real cannot be negated, and cannot come from non-existence or go into non-existence. [12] The analogy of a clay pot explains this definition. A potter can take a lump of clay and mold it into a pot, shape it into a cup, and then flatten it into a plate. Throughout this process different names (*nāma*) and forms (*rūpa*), such as the pot, cup, and plate, are created, but their substance continues to be the same clay. The pot form is subject to change, but the substance of the pot does not change; therefore, within the limited parameters of this analogy, the clay is more real (*satyam*) than the pot or plate, which are its names and forms. This concept is put forth in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.1.4:

> Oh good looking one, as by knowing a lump of earth, all things made of earth become known: All transformation has speech as its basis, and it is name only. Earth as such is the reality.[13]

In explaining this concept in CUbh 6.2.2, Śaṅkara writes:

> Even though a pot is different from a lump, and a lump is different from a pot, still, the lump and the pot are not different from the earth. However, a cow is different from a horse, or a horse from a cow. Therefore pot etc. are merely different configurations of earth, etc. Similarly all these are but different shapes of existence.[14]

Śaṅkara applies the idea underlying the clay/pot analogy to all phenomenal objects in order to arrive at pure existence (*sattā*). Every object exists independent of the mind in the Advaita theory of realism. One says, "The table is," "The chair is," "The tree is." In such expressions "is-ness" appears to be an attribute of the object, meaning the tree or

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[12] Also see BG 2.16.
[13] Gambhirananda 1992, p. 409.
[14] Gambhirananda 1992, p. 421.

table possesses existence. The Advaitin inverts this relationship and says existence is the common denominator and ultimate universal, which possesses or manifests as a particular form, such as the chair. Forms such as the chair and its various properties such as color and density are adventitious and dependent on existence. The forms and properties continue to change but existence remains unchanging and unaffected by changing phenomenal forms and properties. All forms can be discarded and reduced to universal existence.

Another way of approaching *brahman* as pure existence is to attempt to find the fundamental material or basic building block in which existence is located. For example, in locating the existence of the chair we may look to its content, the material wood. However, when we look at wood as the existence constituting the chair we find it is itself an aggregate of forms. Wood further breaks down into elements, such as carbon. In looking for the existence of carbon, it also breaks down into atoms and particles, leading to an indefinite series. The Advaitin believes that anything that possesses form is an aggregate, further divisible into other forms. Discriminating the content into finer forms fails to answer what something is. Therefore the process of searching for essential existence as the most basic underlying cause succumbs to the fallacy of an infinite regress. At this point the Advaitin moves from a physical order of explanation to a metaphysical one. The Advaitin infers that therefore existence cannot be located or confined in any substance or form. The result of this line of reasoning is that the root of all forms is undifferentiated existence, but even though one naturally accepts the fact of existence, existence cannot be located in form or space and is in fact outside of spatial

limitations and therefore infinite.[15] Advaitins go a step further and claim that existence is not limited by time and exists independently of time. It resides as one's deepest self, is a witness to time and stands outside of time.

The Advaitin cannot deny his or her existence, yet cannot locate it in space or time, and thus concludes that individual existence is not individual at all. One's deeply personal sense of existence is not limited to the body or mind. It remains constant and unchanging, regardless of the changing forms of one's mind and body. It is not even subject to death. Advaita's understanding of existence points to the infinite and unchanging nature of *brahman* as one's self. The infinity of *brahman* is immanent in time and space yet stands outside of any temporal or spatial boundaries.

The clay/pot analogy also serves to explain the relationship of dependency. Clay exists independently of the forms it takes, but the pot or plate cannot exist without the substance of clay, and thus are dependent on the clay for their existence. When the material cause is known then all the forms made of that material are known for they are only modifications, says the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. They are *mithyā*, meaning their ontological existence is dependent on the clay. Like the Sāṇkhya philosophy, Advaita holds the position of *satkāryavāda*, in which the effect inheres in the material cause.[16] However, an important point to understand in Advaita's theory of causation, unlike the Sāṇkhya theory, is that the cause is not truly changing and immutable despite the

[15] For example, see CU 6.12 where Uddālaka directs his son, Śvetaketu, to take a banyan fruit, cut it into pieces, and then break the tiny seeds further into pieces, at which point Śvetaketu cannot see anything left. Uddālaka then explains that the banyan tree stands due to this finest unseen essence that makes up the seed, fruit and tree, and this essence is the self of the world.

changing effect. The effect, a change in form, is virtual. It is an appearance (*vivarta*) of change and not an actual transformation (*pariṇāma*) where the nature of the cause intrinsically changes with the effect.[17] So too, the world is only a modification of *brahman*. Even when one says *brahman* is the cause of the universe, this does not mean that *brahman* is a material cause that transforms and changes into the universe. Though there is an appearance of change, *brahman* remains changeless and independent of its effect. This is not to say the world is non-existent, but that its reality is a modification of its source and depends on *brahman* for its existence.

The concepts of absolute reality (*satyam*) and dependent reality (*mithyā*) are integral to Advaita and inform its theories of multiple levels of reality and the doctrine of *māyā*. Advaita holds a doctrine of two truths, or two levels of reality, conventional reality (*vyavahārikasattā*) and absolute reality (*pāramārthikasattā*).[18] Conventional reality is the empirical and transactional world that people commonly accept. But Advaita posits absolute reality as a higher reality. From the level of absolute reality there are no empirical divisions of subject and object, or perceiver and perceived. From this standpoint there is only *brahman*, the ultimate cause in which all causes and effects are reduced to oneness.[19]

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[16] See BSbh 2.1.5-20. The point of *satkāryavāda* for Advaita is nothing about the effect, but that the cause is existent.
[17] The example of milk changing to curd illustrates a *pariṇāma* effect. The milk is the cause of curd but inherently changes and does not continue to exist as milk when the curd is formed.
[18] Some Advaitins sometimes include subjective reality (*pratibhāsikasattā*) as a third level of reality. Subjective reality, in the form of dreams, hallucinations, and projections does not necessarily match conventional reality. It is usually only available to the individual and not shared by a group.
[19] See BSbh 2.1.14 and Śaṅkara's commentary on GK 4.57 and 4.60.

The absolute nature of *brahman* as non-dual appears to contradict the perception of multiplicity within the world. How can absolute reality and conventional reality exist simultaneously and be identical yet fundamentally different? The paradoxical conflict between *brahman* and world is resolved through the famous and often misunderstood doctrine of *māyā*. According to Advaita, *māyā* is the apparent creative capacity of *brahman* and identified with the universe. The definition of *brahman* as what is real is an important point to consider when examining *māyā*. As the universe, *māyā* is an apparent reality that depends on *brahman* for its existence and is thus *mithyā*. From the standpoint of dependency, *māyā* is *brahman* but *brahman* is not *māyā*, just as all forms of clay are necessarily clay but clay is not necessarily one one of those forms. The identity of world and *brahman* is asymmetrical, unlike worldly identities, because from the absolute perspective there is no *māyā*. One cannot identify *brahman* with the world.

Māyā, though not absolutely real, is not simply an illusory or completely non-existent (*tūccham*). For Śaṅkara, non-existence refers to something that can by definition never come into being.[20] Classic examples of non-existence include the horn of a hare, the son of a barren woman, or castles in the sky. Another clear example is a square circle, an impossible shape that contradicts the rules of geometry. Non-existence is incompatible with what is *mithyā*. One would not say that the pot or the wave is an illusion or non-existent. So too, the Advaitin is not denying that the world empirically exists. Due to the relationship of dependency and the doctrine of two levels of reality, the Advaitin concludes that the universe holds a unique ontological category of being

indeterminable or inexpressible (*anirvacanīya*) in relation to *brahman* because it is different than what is ontologically real or unreal (*sadasadvilakṣaṇa*) or is not determinable as being true or something other (*tattvānyatvābhyām anirvacanīya*). Śaṅkara writes,

> *Brahman* becomes subject to all kinds of (phenomenal) actions like transformation, on account of the differences of aspects, constituted by name and form, which remain either differentiated or non-differentiated, which cannot be determined either as real or unreal [*tattvānyatvābhyām anirvacanīyena*] , and which are imagined through ignorance. *Brahman* remains unchanged and beyond all phenomenal actions.[21]

The world is not non-existent or unreal like the square circle, yet it does not possess its own existence because existence depends on *brahman*. The thrust of Advaita's concept of *māyā* and theory of dependency is not to focus on the illusory nature of the world, but rather to encourage the student to switch standpoints. *Māyā* is a conceptual tool to indicate *brahman*, the underlying nature and substratum constituting the world and one's self.[22]

The doctrine of *māyā* is often denigrated as something negative and world denying, and characterized as the deluding power of the world and the problems the world entails. On the other hand, it is also identified as the material body and creative

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[20] CUbh 6.2.1, BGbh 2.16.

[21] BSbh 2.1.27. Gambhirananda 1996, p. 356.
For further discussion of *anirvacanīyatvam* see Hacker 1995, pp. 71-3 and for a different opinion see Comans 2000, pp. 241-6.

[22] Opponents to Advaita or those who wish to distinguish Advaita from other Vedānta traditions, sometimes refer to Advaitins as *māyāvādins*, those who hold the doctrine of *māyā*. While this is not incorrect, it attributes undue importance to *māyā* and may represent the criticism that Advaitins mistakenly believe in the non-existence of the world and *īśvara*. It is more accurate (and perhaps neutral) to call Advaitins *advitīyabrahmavādins* (or some such phrase), "those who hold the doctrine of non-dual *brahman*."

power of *īśvara*.[23] From this latter standpoint, *īśvara* is identified as the lower *brahman*, identical with *vyavahārika* reality and responsible for the manifestation, preservation, and dissolution of the universe.[24] It is both the efficient and material cause of the world and a locus for prayer and worship. *Īśvara* is omniscient as all knowledge, omnipotent as the controller of all things, immanent within the world and all objects, and possessing attributes (*saguṇa*). Yet *īśvara's* reality is ultimately *brahman*, and from the standpoint is transcendent to the world.[25] Similarly, an individual paradoxically holds the status of being the mind-body complex while in reality having no such limitations because one's self is in reality not other than *brahman*.

1.3: *Brahman* as Awareness

Theories of awareness or consciousness that are limited to an individual ego are strikingly different from Advaita's theory of consciousness. Śaṅkara identifies consciousness or awareness (*cit* or *caitanyam*) with the basic sense of self-existence everyone possesses, but does not consider awareness to be a product of mind or body. Awareness is limitless by nature and pure, in the sense that is free from any relations, attributes, or predication. Advaita claims that awareness is not a substance available for qualification. It cannot be a quality or possess qualities, for all qualities are dependent on a substance. Nor does Advaita consider awareness episodic or subject to birth and death.

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[23] BUbh 4.4.22, BSbh 1.4.3.

[24] BSbh 1.1.11, 2.1.14, 4.3.14.

[25] My depiction of *īśvara* is simplified here. The question of *īśvara*'s identity in Śaṅkara's thought and in relationship to *para* (higher) and *apara* (lower) *brahman* (or to *brahman* with or without attributes) or with *māyā* is complicated and disputed by scholars. Śaṅkara himself assigns different meanings to *īśvara* in his various commentaries, sometimes identifying *īśvara* with *brahman* and sometimes not. It is unnecessary to

It has no beginning or end. Awareness is unchanging and never separate from one's self. There is no past or future absence of awareness, including states of deep sleep or death; thus awareness is the constant principle underlying all change, is ubiquitous, and exists independently of time or space. Time and space only pertain to objects of awareness. Awareness is also non-intentional (*aviṣayatā*) because awareness is non-dual and thus there is no object outside of itself of which it could be directed towards. Nor is there an agent standing wielding awareness. It is identified with the primary essence and very existence of all names and forms, though not limited to those forms in any way. This conception of *brahman* as awareness, the absolute ground and reality of all phenomena and individuals, equates awareness with *brahman* understood as undifferentiated existence. *Brahman* is the totality and basis of existence, and knowing is the essential nature of *brahman* like heat is to fire.[26]

According to the Advaitin, awareness is self-illuminating (*svataḥ prakāśa*) or intrinsically reflexive and does not require a second or higher-order cognition to reveal it. This concept is crucial for understanding Advaita's theory of consciousness and its theories of knowledge. Śaṅkara elaborates on the theory of *svataḥ prakāśa* based on passages such the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.6. There the sage Yājñvalkya speaks to King Janaka of the self as its own light:

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explore such details in this study. See Comans 2000, pp. 184-202, 215-31, Hacker 1995, pp. 85-96, and Warrier 1997.

[26] *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. 4.3.30, "for the knower's function of knowing can never be lost, because it is imperishable." (Madhavanda 1993, p. 472).

na hi vijñātur vijñāter viparilopaḥ vidyate 'vināśitvāt

> 'When the sun and the moon have both set, the fire has gone out, and speech has stopped, Yājñavalkya, what exactly serves as the light for *ātman*?" 'The self serves as his light. It is through the light of the self that he sits, goes out, works and returns.' 'It is just so, Yājñavalkya.'[27]

The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.2.15 compares *brahman* to the sun, which does not need another source of light to illuminate it:

> There the sun does not shine, neither do the moon and the stars; nor do these flashes of lightning shine. How can this fire? He shining, all these shine; through his luster all these are variously illumined.[28]

Śaṅkara writes in his introduction to the *Brahmasūtra* that the *ātman* as awareness is not an object (*viṣaya*) of knowledge but is not absolutely not an object either. It cannot be known as an object but is not beyond apprehension because it is the content of 'I' and always directly and self-evidently known.[29] Citsukha, an Advaitin of the 13 th century, expands upon Śaṅkara's understanding of self-illumination and defines *svataḥ prakāśa* as "the capability of being called immediate in empirical usage while remaining at the same time the non-object of knowledge."[30] It is important to note that, according to the mainstream Advaita conception, awareness does not objectify itself and is self-illuminating in the negative sense that it is not manifested by any other cognition.[31] In his commentary on Gauḍapāda's *Kārikā* 3.33, Śaṅkara writes "the self being ever a

[27] BU 4.3.6. Madhavananda 1993. p. 420.
[28] KU 2.2.15. Gambhirananda 1995, p.211.
[29] *na tāvad ayam ekāntenāviṣayaḥ, asmatpratyayaviṣayatvāt aparokṣatvac ca pratyagātmaprasiddheḥ.*
[30] *avedyatve sati aparokṣavyavahārayogyatvam* (Trivedi 1987, p. 118).
[31] Saksena 1944, p. 78.

homogeneous mass of consciousness, like the sun that is by nature a constant light, does not depend on any other knowledge (for its revelation).[32]

The Advaitin's metaphysical view of awareness as non-dual potentially excludes many questions of epistemology, and he faces a difficult ontological hurdle in making the transition from pure non-dual awareness to explaining the existence of the dualistic universe. This also holds true for explaining cognition of objects. From the absolute standpoint (*pāramārthikavyavasthā*) there is only awareness and no individual or cognition comprised of subject, object, and instrument of knowledge. From the empirical or conventional standpoint (*vyāvahārikavyavasthā*) there obviously is. For Śaṅkara it is a fruitless and mistaken search to look for a true causal connection between pure consciousness and cognition or between consciousness and the world. Objects in the world are found to be indeterminable as real or unreal, and that which is indeterminable cannot have a casual connection with the ultimately real *brahman*. To look for a causal connection is to misunderstand the nature of the dependent world of names and forms and its relationship (or lack of one) of dependency and identity with *brahman*.

Despite the lack of causal connections, Śaṅkara felt compelled to provide some metaphorical examples to explain the occurrence of mental awareness while simultaneously claiming it is not different from absolute non-dual awareness, as well as to account for the distinction of individual and *īśvara*, and the relationship of *brahman*

[32] Gambhirananda 1992, p. 306. Also see BSbh 2.3.7, US prose 2.91. *nityaprakāśasvarūpa iva savitā nityavijñānaikarasaghanatvān na jñānāntaram apekṣata ityarthaḥ*

and objects. He provides two primary theories, reflection and limitation, sometimes in conjunction with the other.[33] For example, he writes in BSbh 3.2.18,

> Since this self is by nature consciousness itself, distinctionless, beyond speech and mind, and can be taught by way of negating other things, hence in the scriptures dealing with liberation an illustration is cited by saying that it is "like the sun reflected in water". Here the aspect kept in view is the one with attributes, which is not real and which is created by limiting adjuncts, as it is done in such texts, "As this luminous sun, through one in itself, becomes multifarious owing to its entry into water divided by different pots, similarly this deity, the birthless self-effulgent self, though one, seems to be diversified owing to its entry into the different bodies, constituting its limiting adjuncts."[34]

The metaphor of the sun's reflection in water explains cognition and the individuated person as a reflection of consciousness (*cidābhāsa* or *pratibimbavāda*).[35] The mind, or inner instrument (*antaḥkaraṇa*), is a subtle substance that appears to reflect awareness like a mirror or water reflects sunlight. The reflection of awareness and the mistaken superimposition of awareness onto the mind lead to an individual sense of awareness. Of course there is no literal reflection of awareness, but there is an "as though" reflection when the *ātman* manifests in the mind as awareness. Śaṅkara also employs another theory, the limitation theory (*avacchedavāda*), to counter the obvious problem of dualities inherent to the reflection theory, such as reflection and the source of reflection or material and light. The *avaccheda* theory explains that just as non-dual space is perceived as limited by a pot, which makes a pot space, so too is non-dual *brahman* mistakenly understood as limited by the mind, giving rise to mental awareness. Absolute

[33] BSbh 2.3.46, 3.2.18.
[34] Gambhirananda 1996, p. 615.

space cannot be divided or limited and is therefore never separate from the pot space in past, present, or future. There is nothing to separate the space in a room from the space in the pot; however, the form of the pot leads to this error, serving as a limiting property (*upādhi*) that is superimposed onto space.[36] Yet the larger space is unaffected by the pot space, even when the pot is broken.

Post-Śaṅkara Advaitins debated the merits of the *pratibimba* and *avaccheda* theories. Padmapāda, Prakāśātman, and the Vivaraṇa school of Advaita emphasized the *pratibimbavāda*.[37] Vācaspati Miśra and the Bhāmatī school favored the *avacchedavāda* theory. The focus of the *pratibimba* theory on reflection and prototype emphasizes the positive identity and non-difference of individual and *ātman*.[38] The *avacchedavāda* does not emphasize identity in order to refrain from the mistaken objectification of awareness or the problematic of explaining how consciousness can be reflected.

Both *pratibimbavāda* and *avacchedavāda* are closely related to Śaṅkara's theory of mistaken superimposition of mind on awareness and vice versa,[39] yet superimposition does not completely explain the relationship awareness has with the individual. To further explain this relationship, the Śaṅkara introduces the concept of the witness

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[35] See BSbh 2.3.46, 2.3.50, 3.2.18-20, and TUbh 2.6. For later Advaitins see *Pañcadaśī* 4.29-31 and chapter 10, Also see, pp. 179-183 of Madhavananda's (1993) translation of *Vedānta Paribhāśa*.

[36] Roodurmun 2002, p. 139.
See BSbh 1.2.6, GK 3.3-7.

[37] Śureśvara held a theory similar to *pratibimba* called *ābhāsavāda* (appearance or semblance of *brahman*). The difference being that a semblance only resembles the prototype, but is essentially different from it (Balasubramanian 2000, p. 221).

[38] Potter 1981, p. 73.

[39] One may question how this is possible if awareness is not an object. The Advaitin replies that awareness is still known as the content of 'I' and is thus subject to superimposition.

(*sākṣin)*. The theories of *pratibimbavāda* and *avacchedavāda*, self-illumination, superimposition, and witnessing awareness comprise a unified set of coherent concepts to explain awareness and the mind. Śaṅkara adopts the concept of *sākṣin* from texts such as the *Kena Upaniṣad* 1.2:

> That which is the ear behind the ear, the mind behind the mind, the speech behind speech, and indeed the breath behind the breath – wise persons, having become freed from these become immortal when they leave this world.[40]

This verse describes *brahman* as the witness (*sākṣin*), which is the underlying subject that objectifies the mind and sense organs and directly and independently illumines all that is falsely superimposed on it. The *sākṣin* is not subject to the fluctuations of the mind and body, and is unaffected by what it illumines. It is pure awareness and is the very presupposition of all experience and knowledge. For the Advaitin, this witnessing awareness is the most basic epistemological factor and presupposed in all knowing. The *sākṣin* is self-existent and self-luminous. For Śaṅkara, awareness does not require an object. For example, in deep dreamless sleep, he claims that awareness continues regardless of an object.[41] In the Śaṅkara's theory of apprehension, awareness remains as an unchanging presence, which simply illumines whatever mental thought mode arises in the mind including modes of both ignorance (*ajñānavṛtti*) and modes of conventional apprehension (*jñānavṛtti*).[42] Due to the *sākṣin*, wherever there is apprehension of an

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40 *śrotrasya śrotraṁ manaso mano yad vāco ha vācaṁ sa u prāṇasya prāṇaḥ |*
cakṣuṣaś cakṣur atimucya dhīrāḥ pretyāsmāl lokād amṛtā bhavanti || KeU 1.2 (my translation).
Also see BU 3.4.2.
41 USG 2.93.
42 USG 2.75.

object, the fact of that object is immediately known. Conventional apprehension (as opposed to absolute apprehension of Brahman) is itself not self-illuminating but it does not need another apprehension for its revelation. If so, then the second would require a third, leading to an infinite regress. Apprehension is revealed as soon as it rises because it is directly illumined by the *sākṣin* without any mediation. The *sākṣin* is already present as the very ground or basis, the primitive presence of one's own being and sense of self and the locus (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of reflexive awareness It is an eternal, self-illuminating, neutral awareness that manifests everything else. To quote Bina Gupta, "*Sākṣin*, in other words, is a form of apprehension that is direct, non-relational, nonpropositional, and nonevaluative in both cognitive and practical affairs. It is the basis of all knowledge."[43]

For Śaṅkara, awareness is intrinsically non-intentional and formless. Intentionality, form, and content are superimposed onto it. When a mental thought mode (*antaḥkaraṇavṛtti*) takes place, it takes the form of the object, and is immediately and directly known by witnessing awareness. It is only the *antaḥkaraṇa* (the "inner instrument" composed of the intellect, mind, memory, and I-notion in the Advaita conception) that changes and is intentional and relational, but these qualities appear to qualify consciousness.[44] The *sākṣin* illumines the cognition without becoming one itself and does not need to have its own existence revealed. It is important to note that the

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[43] Gupta 1998, p. 5.

[44] Mohanty 2000, p. 15. See BUbh 3.4.2, *Vedāntaparibhāṣā*, Ch. 1 p. 32 in Madhavananda 1963. Further discussion on the mind is in my section, "Gaining Purity of Mind" in chapter two. Unless otherwise noted, I use "mind" as a general translation of *antaḥkaraṇa* which includes all four components of the *antaḥkaraṇa*.

antaḥkaraṇavṛtti, along with the mind, is inert and is not self-illuminating by itself. Apprehension, in the form of illumination (*prakāśa*), is the nature of the *sākṣin* alone.

According to Śaṅkara, *brahman* is the absolute basis of awareness as well as the existence of all objects in the universe. This raises some interesting conflicts with the concept of the *sākṣin*, because the *sākṣin* is differentiated from external objects. What is the relationship of the witness to external objects? If the witnessing awareness is distinguished from all objects, then how can Śaṅkara transition to the metaphysical claim that the same awareness is none other than the existence underlying all names and forms? These questions bring us back to the relationship of *brahman* with the world and the solution in the theories of *māyā* and *mithyātvam*. *Māyā* is the bridge to understanding how the self can be both the *sākṣin* and the world. Śaṅkara speaks of awareness on two levels, the absolute level where it is pure awareness and the empirical level where it is witnessing awareness reflected in the mind and manifesting as mental activity. The duality of witness and object only exists from the standpoint of conventional reality. It serves as a teaching method and preliminary step for self-inquiry, but is dismissed as the student progresses towards an understanding of nonduality. Understanding these basic concepts is fundamental to the process of contemplation and will be further explained in the following chapters.

A theory closely related to self-illuminating awareness is Advaita's theory of the origin, apprehension, and certification of truth, namely intrinsic veridicality (*svataḥ prāmāṇya*). Though Śaṅkara only holds this theory in a nascent form, other Advaitins subsequently developed it in detail, and the topic, though somewhat technical, requires

some elaboration to better understand *nididhyāsana*. A discussion of intrinsic validity is subsequent to *prakāśa* because Advaita's theories of truth and certification are directly dependent on and extended by presupposed theories of consciousness and illumination. Without the knowledge itself there is no question of truth or falsity of apprehension. According to Advaita, truth is known immediately with the apprehension of cognition. Certification of truth is natural and intrinsic to cognition and does not depend on extrinsic factors or a secondary process such as inference. In a sense there is no separation between awareness and truth. The Advaitin may argue that in daily life and in science we do not and cannot find absolute verification of any fact despite our effort. There is always the possibility, no matter how remote, that a future cognition will correct an earlier one. Furthermore, the nature of objects is indeterminable and name and form are negated by the direct recognition of *brahman*. To claim the necessity of absolute certification would lead to hopeless skepticism and an inability to conduct any normal activity, and is ultimately not possible because *brahmavidyā* negates the reality of the objects in question.

The most common Advaitin definition of truth is a cognition that is not contradicted. Non-contradiction (*abādhitva*) is a purposely negative definition of truth. Advaitins employ this negative definition because they have no need for positive criteria for truth when it is the cognitive default. In the case of self-illuminating awareness concerned with the truth of itself, there is no possibility of extrinsic certification, for cognition is known immediately and cannot be known by a second cognition. Only

awareness itself has access to itself as awareness.[45] In contrast, Advaitins only search for criteria of falsity, where knowledge is accepted as true until proven otherwise.[46] Cognitions of external objects are not absolutely true though, for objects do not have absolute reality and are sublated by liberating self-knowledge. [47] Ultimately self-knowledge is the only cognition that is absolutely not negatable. It stands outside of any dichotomies such as true and false and is not subject to external justification like empirical knowledge.

Advaitins face an obvious difficulty in accounting for error through the *svataḥ prāmāṇya* theory. The *svataḥ prāmāṇya* theory says truth (*pramā*) is intrinsic to cognition, but it is a common experience for someone to consider a cognition as true and later realize it is false. If all cognitions are intrinsically true, then how can error arise in the first place? How can one distinguish error from truth? Intrinsic validity either completely excludes error or has the contradictory job of separating truth from error. Advaitins were well aware of this critique and did not ignore the possibility of errors like projections, hallucinations, and other misjudgments. One may react to the *svataḥ prāmāṇya* theory due to its strictness and apparent exclusion of error; but it is not as strict and more palatable when Advaita's criteria for error are factored in. Advaitins explain

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[45] Phillips 1997, p. 79.

[46]See Mohanty 1989, Bilmoria 1985, and Chatterjee 1991.

Later Advaitins gave different definitions of truth to deflect new criticisms. Madhusūdana Saraswati for example does not accept non-contradiction as a successful definition of truth, and in his *Advaitaratnarakṣaṇam* defines truth as "the property of being a certain apprehension of an object which was previously unknown."(*ajñātārthaniścayātmakatvam eva prāmāṇyam*). Quoted in Mohanty 1989, p. 16

[47] See *Vedānta Paribhāṣā,* p. 150 (7.1). Madhusūdana Saraswati believes that truth is *anirvacanīya* (*pramātvam anirvacanīyaṃ lokasiddham*), though he has to make an exception to this to account for empirical dealings. Quoted from *Advaitaratnarakṣaṇam* in Chaterjee 1991, p. 247 fn. 11.

error as an aberration due to the improper use of a means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). When the *pramāṇa* is not properly aligned, knowledge cannot take place and error may arise. Error is known through another cognition that corrects the first (false) cognition, or through a cognition that contradicts the first one or shows some defect or lack in the *pramāṇa*. The latter situation causes doubt that eventually leads to correction. Advaitins seek correction only when there is reason to doubt the cognition. The key difference is that they do not consider error as *jñāna*, but as something falsely appearing as knowledge (*jñānābhāsa*). External tests are not for certification of truth, but for apprehension of error and the defects that caused the doubt.[48] It must be remembered that the absence of defects is also not the cause of apprehending truth. Truth is apprehended with the conditions responsible for the cognition of the object.[49]

If certification of truth is unnecessary, and indeed not possible according to intrinsic validity, then where does one differentiate between knowledge and belief? To say that knowledge and belief are not different sounds hopelessly naïve, for one cannot deny that beliefs are sometimes false. In answer to this question a *svataḥ prāmāṇyavādin* may claim a psychological account of intrinsic validity, which refers to the sense of certainty we assume in most cognitive instances; however, psychologism is a weak response because it does not distinguish between knowledge and belief and removes the idea that true knowledge must match the object. According to Advaita truth is not identical with a psychological sense of certainty. Instead, Advaitins identify knowledge

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[48] Chatterjee 1991, p. 243.
[49] Chatterjee 1991, p. 246

(*jñāna*) with true apprehension (*pramātva*), and exclude error completely from knowledge.

1.4: *Brahman* as Limitlessness:

The third part of Advaita's basic definition of *brahman* is *ānanda*. This word is often translated as "bliss". "Bliss" is not exactly wrong, but because it implies a perfect state of joy, ecstasy, or rapture it leads to the confusion that *ānanda* is an experience of mental or physical bliss. People may then believe that liberation is gained through a mystical blissful experience. However, such experiences of bliss are time-bound, have numerous degrees and intensities, and are brought about by states of mind.[50] According to the Upaniṣads, *brahman* is infinite and free from change; therefore, *ānanda* cannot be a changing mental state or physical sensation that is objectifiable. Śaṅkara writes:

> Hence the text, 'knowledge, bliss,' etc., must be interpreted as setting forth the nature of *brahman*, and not signifying that the bliss of the self is cognized. [51]

Brahman as *ānanda* refers to the infinite nature of one's self, which is never subject to fluctuation, decay, inadequacy, or finiteness. *Ānanda* is the limitless nature of *brahman*, absolutely full and complete (*pūrṇa*). Therefore it is perhaps more accurate to translate *ānanda* as limitlessness (*anantatvam*) or wholeness (*pūrṇatvam*) rather than bliss to describe more aptly the complete nature of *ānanda* that is not born out of contact between a sense organ and an object. Pleasant experiences that arise from the sense

[50] It is interesting to note that Śaṅkara rarely, and cautiously uses the term *ānanda* to define *brahman*. In the entire US he only characterizes *brahman* as *ānanda* twice and rarely does so in his BSbh, except when forced to by the root text (Mayeda 1965, p. 186).

organs are of a relative nature, and are only a finite and changing reflection of *ānanda* manifest as a mental state. Absolute *ānanda*, or fullness, is quite different than relative pleasure. It is not episodic, has no beginning or end, and is the very nature of *brahman*. This is stated in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.6.1,

> He (Bhṛgu) understood *ānanda* as *brahman*; for, indeed, from *ānanda* all these beings are born; having been born, they are sustained by *ānanda*; they approach and enter into *ānanda* (upon death).[52]

Fullness is one's self-nature, not something to gain, experience, or accomplish. However, Advaita appears to contradict itself because people do not always experience happiness. If in reality the self is fullness, and by nature devoid of suffering, why then do people not experience that continuously? Daily life is filled with both happy and sad moments. If both types of emotion are part of normal experience, then how can fullness be intrinsic to the self? According to Advaita, moments of happiness and sorrow are manifestations of the mind only, not the self. Sorrow is caused when the mind is agitated and unable to reflect the fullness of the self. The fleeting moments of pleasures and happiness encountered in life are just the fragmentary reflections of the fullness of the self, experienced when the mind is quiet or in an altered state.

The cause of sorrow differs from individual to individual, but sorrow is only experienced through the thought modifications (*vṛtti*) in the mind. Even if the cause is present, the sorrow will not manifest without the corresponding thought modifications.

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[51]BUbh 3.9.28.7. Madhvananda 1993, p. 396. This is the concluding statement of a long discussion distinguishing *ānanda* as perceived or experienced pleasure from the nature of *brahman* as *ānanda*.

[52] *ānando brahmeti vyajānāt | ānandād dhy eva khalv imāni bhūtāni jāyante | ānandena jātāni jīvanti | ānandaṁ prayanty abhisaṁviśantīti |* TU 3.6.1 (my translation).

For example, pain in the body is not experienced when the mind is engrossed in an activity or in deep sleep. In deep dreamless sleep the self is present without the sorrow that the mind creates. Sorrow has no power unless the corresponding thought modification is manifest. The mind naturally returns to a state of fullness when there are no agitating thoughts. When the mind reaches a quiet state, a natural experience of fullness and happiness results. This distinction between *ānanda* as *brahman* and *ānanda* as a blissful state is crucial because otherwise Advaita practitioners may falsely assume that a blissful experience is synonymous with self-knowledge. People then try to "reach" *brahman* through an ecstatic state of bliss or a thoughtless state devoid of sorrow induced through meditation. These states may be powerful and transformative, but fall infinitely short of liberation. Unfortunately, even though those experiences are wonderful, they result only in a happy memory and a burning desire for similar experiences. They do not result in self-knowledge and may instead lead to further craving for mystical experiences and potentially aggrandize a spiritual ego.

1.5: The Goal

The fundamental goal of Advaita is to understand the identity between individual and infinite *brahman*, a truth which is unfortunately veiled by ignorance in the form of superimposition. Knowledge of *brahman* (*brahmavidyā*) allows the student to make a staggering metaphysical transition where his or her most precious sense of "I" moves from a limited entity to a universal and singular *brahman*. There is no separation and no potential for feeling separated from *brahman* or *īśvara* when one directly recognizes non-duality through a unique apprehension of *brahman*. For Advaitins, this is an integral

truth not simply meant for pedantic philosophical discussion of intellectualization, but one that must be directly recognized. The idea of non-duality may sound nonsensical and certainly contrary to experience, but according to Advaitins, it is something that needs to be studied systematically with a teacher in its variegated nuances to be recognized. The Advaita teaching methodology is designed to lead the student to the direct recognition that his or her self is *brahman* by differentiating the self from the mind and body and revealing its infinite nature.

The key to Advaita's knowledge of non-duality is to recognize *brahman* as the primitive unchanging presence, basis, and content of the subjective experience that lies at the core of a person's sense of self. This is a process of knowledge that removes false superimpositions of body, senses, and mind previously attributed to *brahman*. The Advaita teaching method leads one to see through the false projections of limitation and suffering superimposed on the self. One must first differentiate the self from limiting adjuncts such as the mind and body, with which it has erroneously been identified, and secondly recognize the non-dual nature of that self. Only when all conceptions of "I" as "this" or "that" are negated can pure awareness be understood as identical with one's self. All that is required is the direct recognition of this fact. There is nothing new to gain because one already is the self. There is nowhere to go because the self is already present. And there is nothing to change because the self is already available, immutable, and whole.

Unfortunately, destroying one's ignorance is not so easy even though there is nothing to accomplish. If it was, then one could be liberated simply by glancing at an

Upaniṣad, or listening to a teacher who says "you are *brahman*." But this is clearly not the case and highly unlikely even if theoretically possible. The Advaitin still faces an arduous journey to discover self-knowledge. So how does one read or listen to words to make that liberating knowledge manifest in one's live as living wisdom? Where do practices such as meditation fall into this process? And how does one assimilate something as large and abstract as non-duality through contemplative methods? The following chapters discuss the ways Śaṅkara attempts to solve these questions.

Chapter 2: Action (*karman*) and Knowledge (*jñāna*)

Controversy over the nature of action and knowledge, and the relationship these two have with liberation, engaged Indian philosophers during Śaṅkara's time period. This debate is derived from and contextualized in ritual theory, which is crucial for understanding Advaita praxis and *nididhyāsana* in particular. As an orthodox and orthoprax upholder of the Vedic tradition, Śaṅkara was embedded in a culture that valued ritual action. The degree to which Vedic ritual was practiced during Śaṅkara's time period is a matter of historical speculation; but there is no doubt that the Pūrvamīmāṃsā philosophy, which deals with Vedic ritual and textual hermeneutics, was an influential force pervading all brāhmaṇical intellectual traditions at that time, from ritual to philosophy to law. Thus, Śaṅkara's interest in philosophical dialogue with Mīmāṃsā comes as no surprise. His exegetical strategies are largely derived from Mīmāṃsā, and numerous aspects of his metaphysical and epistemological analysis find their precursors in Mīṃāmsā philosophy. Despite this dependence on Mimāṃsā, we find an ubiquitous concern with disputing Mīmāṃsā throughout Śaṅkara's writing in the form of a critique of action (*karman*) and his emphasis on renunciation. Śaṅkara, as well as his immediate disciples, made every effort to distinguish knowledge and action, negate action as a means for liberation, and to champion knowledge as the only means of liberation.[53]

[53] Śaṅkara's commentary on BS 1.1.4 (*samanvaya adhikaraṇa*) is his most exhaustive discussion putatively refuting action and establishing knowledge as the only means for liberation.

In this chapter I outline the Pūrva Mīmāṃsaka's understanding of action first, particularly the relationship of action and language. Then I explain Śaṅkara's refutation of action as an independent means for liberation and why he claims cognition is the sole means for liberation according to Advaita. The second half of the chapter explores Advaita's use of actions, such as meditation, to gain the proper qualifications for gaining knowledge, contrasts meditation and contemplation, and lastly shows how the knowledge and action debate highlights difficulties in understanding contemplation. As I will argue, the contentious discussions, ambiguities, and paradoxes surrounding *nididhyāsana* are rooted in intra-Advaita debates regarding the relationship of action and knowledge. In particular, Advaita philosophers faced the critique that *nididhyāsana* is an action and thus strove to distinguish it from any action.

2.1.1: Pūrvamīmāṃsā and *karman*

The Mīmāṃsaka's world revolves around the sacrifice (*yajña*). His central concern is the proper performance of *yajña* in terms of words uttered, materials used, correct actions in the right sequence, etc. by a qualified sacrificial performer. Proper sacrifice contributes to upholding social and universal order, and is instrumental to the individual's pursuit of duty (*dharma*) and liberation. Ritual practices create an unseen residual power (*apūrva śakti*), which causes the manifestation of the fruits of action. In support of this concern with ritual, the Mīmāṃsā tradition developed a vast literature dealing with exegetical strategies, ritual theory, and a supporting system of epistemology and metaphysics.

Like most Indian philosophical traditions, the Mīmāṃsaka's conception of liberation is the cessation of *karman*. *Karman* comprises the bondage that keeps people individuated through endless lifetimes in bodies that are subject to suffering. When this *karman* ends there is no more bondage and thus liberation.[54] In order to achieve the highest human goal, the individual must refrain from prohibited actions and perform other actions, particularly the daily (*nitya*) and periodical (*naimittika*) rites. One must avoid prohibited actions because they result in further bondage, and perform ritual actions because they expiate bondage. If one does not perform those actions he will generate *karmic* bondage.[55] This process eliminates one's *karman*, which was produced through proper action (*dharma*) and improper action (*adharma*). Eventually there is no more cause for taking birth.[56]

The central concern of avoiding wrong actions and performing sacrificial action is interdependent with Mīmāṃsā's analysis of Vedic texts. The Vedas are the only means of knowledge for ritual action. They are infallible, eternal, authorless, and give the means and results of ritual action. Vedic sentences have meaning according to their connection with sacrifice, and sacrifice is understood only through the instructions and injunctions in the texts. To give up ritual action would make the Vedas meaningless. The second *sūtra* of Jaimini's *Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtras* (PMS) states, "*Dharma* is an aim that is characterized by injunction (*codanā*)."[57] *Codanā* is defined as a sentence that enjoins an

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[54] Ramprasad 2000, p. 26.
[55] Ramprasad 2000, p. 30.
[56] K.T. Pandurangi 2006, p. 568.
[57] *codanālakṣaṇo 'rtho dharmaḥ* (PMS 1.1.2)

individual towards a particular action. *Dharma* is only known through injunctive sentences found in the Vedas,[58] and one should fulfill injunctions for Vedic sacrifice.

According to the Mīmāṃsaka, the meaning of a Vedic injunctive sentence is tied to the action it enjoins. The entire Veda's true intention is to convey action, and this action is known through injunctions. Injunctions are primarily denoted through imperative or optative suffixes in verbs that order action. For example, in the sentence *svargakāmo yajeta* (the one desirous of heaven should perform sacrifice), the verb *yajeta* is in the optative mode (*viddhi liṅ*) and enjoins sacrifice.

However, apart from injunctive (*vidhi*) and prohibitory (*niṣedha*) sentences, the Vedas contain sentences that do not carry any injunctive force in their verbs. Mīmāṃsa classifies these as *mantra* (hymn), *nāma* (naming), and *arthavāda* (eulogistic or explanatory) sentences. In the PMS 1.2.1, Jaimini raises an objection, questioning whether such sentences, particularly *arthavādas*, have any overall significance.

> The purpose of the Veda lying in the laying down of action, those (parts of it) which do not serve that purpose are useless; and in these therefore is the Veda said to be non-eternal (i.e. of no permanent value).[59]

Here the opponent (*pūrvapakṣa*) in *sūtras* 1.2.1-6 claims that all sentences that do not immediately bear on action or prohibition do not deal with *dharma*, and are therefore meaningless. Many such sentences are simply statements of Vedic facts or assertive propositions such as "Vāyu is the swiftest deity." In response, Jaimini writes:

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[58] See PMS 1.1.5.
[59] PMS 1.2.1 (Jha 1916, p. 22).

> Inasmuch as they are syntactically connected with the injunctive passages, they (*arthvāda* passages would be) (authoritative), by reason of their serving the purpose of praising what has been enjoined (PMS 1.2.7)[60]

The Mīmāṃsaka cannot accept that any portion of the Veda is meaningless; for such an admission may lead to the doubt whether the Vedas are truly infallible. This *sūtra* points out that *arthavāda* sentences indeed have a purpose because they are connected to injunctions and prohibitions, and are thus helpful for *dharma*. *Arthavāda*s help by praising enjoined actions, which prompts people to perform the enjoined action.

From the Advaitin's standpoint, the Mīmāṃsā definition of assertive propositions as *arthavāda*, along with their inclusive way of accepting them as helpful for injunctions, is deeply problematic. This definition may seem inclusive, yet is intended to exclude the importance of sentences that provide factual statements or convey knowledge of an existing entity. According to the Mīmāṃsaka, the Upaniṣads, which focus on self-knowledge, metaphysical and ontological realities, and various meditations, is supplementary to the *mantra* and *brāhmaṇa* sections of the Veda. If the Advaitin accepts this view, then virtually the whole of the Upaniṣads becomes merely *arthavāda* and subsidiary to these other portions of the Vedas and the rituals they enjoin.

In the Mīmāṁsaka view, Upaniṣadic discussions of one's identity with *brahman* is only a means of praising the ritual and the results of ritual that accrue to the sacrificer, not a means for liberation. Ignorance is neither a major factor nor a cause for bondage, and self-knowledge (*ātmajñāna*) is only for the sake of the ritual (*kratvartha*).[61] Self-

[60] PMS 1.2.7 (Jha 1916, p. 26).

[61] See K.T. Pandurangi 2006, p. 569, and Kumārila's *arthavādādhikaraṇam* in his *Tantravārttika*.

knowledge functions solely to show the sacrificer that his self is other than the body, and that this non-physical self can enjoy the results of *yāga* in a heavenly world. Thus self-knowledge serves as an indirect subsidiary for liberation by enabling the performance of rituals. Śaṅkara makes every effort to criticize this position to defend self-knowledge as the means for liberation, as well as to establish that the Upaniṣads alone can trigger this liberating knowledge. Upaniṣadic instruction about *brahman* has its own independent purpose of removing ignorance and achieving liberation.[62]

It is clear in the Mīmāṃsaka's view that self-knowledge is not understood as a means for liberation, but rather as a subsidiary process necessary for the proper completion of ritual. Knowledge is significant only in support of action. And though it may lead to correct action, it cannot effect action or the results of action. The Mīmāṃsaka's subordination of self-knowledge in particular can be viewed in a strong thesis and a weak thesis. In the strong thesis, self-knowledge has no reference to liberation, and only informs and prompts the agent and the requisite actions. In the weak thesis, self-knowledge is still subordinate to action, but has some direct reference to liberation, in that the actions leading to liberation must be informed by it.[63] Both versions are unacceptable to Śaṅkara.

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[62] Śaṅkara provides discussion in his commentary on BS 1.1.4.

[63] C. Ramprasad 2000, p. 10. See Ramprasad 2000, p. 8-14 for a concise explanation of the relationship of action and knowledge in Mīmāṃsā.

There are some differences regarding the relationship of action and knowledge within the vast corpus of Mīmāṁsā literature. For example, see Kumarila on the *vyākaraṇa adhikaraṇa* where he makes an exception and gives more importance to self-knowledge (Pandurangi 2006, p. 570), than does his rival Prabhākara.

2.1.2: Śaṅkara's Rejection of Action

Śaṅkara is not opposed to the pursuit of heaven or material ends through ritual action. In fact, as an orthoprax upholder of Vedicism he supports such action, as long as one recognizes that they are limited to their respective ends. Śaṅkara also supports the practice of *nitya* (daily) and *naimittika* (periodic) *karman*s such as *agnihotra* (the daily fire ritual) and *śrāddha* (ancestral death rites) for householders who are, he says, obligated to perform those rituals. Yet Śaṅkara's views on action and knowledge are almost the exact opposite of Mīmāṃsā. Renowned as an advocate of a form of renunciation in which all ritual actions are prohibited, he makes room however for ritual action within his Advaita teaching. He accepts *karman* at a subsidiary level, used by householders as a supplemental practice for enabling self-knowledge. In a strong thesis, *karman* generates results that remove obstacles to the path of self-knowledge. In a weak thesis, ritual action only contributes to a desire for self-knowledge. Ritual is a subsidiary for mental actions such as meditation, which cultivate mental purity and are themselves subsidiary to self-knowledge. From this perspective action serves as remote tertiary auxiliary cause with respect to liberation.[64] In BSbh 3.4.27, Śaṅkara writes:

> Hence sacrifices, etc. and self-control, etc., which are the duties of the respective stages of life, are all but means for the emergence of knowledge. And yet among these, such means as self-control, etc., which are connected with knowledge by the clause, 'He who knows as such' (BU 4.4.23), are proximate to knowledge, while the other means, viz sacrifices etc., are external (i.e. remote), they being

[64] In a slightly weaker thesis, ritual action can directly give mental purity and removes obstacles in the pursuit of liberation when performed with the attitude of the *yoga* of action (*karma yoga*) described generally in the BG and specifically BUbh 3.3.1 and BSbh 4.1.18. See next section on purity of mind for a brief description of *karma yoga*.

> connected with the 'seeking to know' (BU 4.4.22). This is how these are to be distinguished.[65]

Śaṅkara's views on action and knowledge are reflected in his categorization of Vedic literature. He formulates a break in the Vedic literature; the first section, including the *mantra* and *brāhmaṇa* sections, is concerned with ritual action (*karmakānda*) and the second section is comprised of the Upaniṣads, which reveal ultimate knowledge (*jñānakānda*).[66] With this hermeneutical move he separates the intentions of different part of the texts so that they do not conflict with each other and can accommodate the views of both Mīmāṃsakas and Advaitins. This move also neutralizes the Mīmāṃsaka attempt to include the Upaniṣads within ritual literature as mere *arthavāda*.

Śaṅkara agrees with the Mīmāṃsakas that the Vedas are the authority for ritual as well as understanding reality, and that action and knowledge operate in mutually distinct domains. Action and knowledge are mutually autonomous and do not have an effect on each other's content.[67] Cognition is not identical to action, does not produce action, and cannot destroy the results of action. Action cannot produce knowledge or destroy ignorance (*avidyā*). Unlike the Mīmāṃsaka however, Śaṅkara finds the root cause of bondage not in *karman,* but in ignorance. The Mīmāṃsaka focuses on ritual for removing *karman*, but Śaṅkara is concerned with knowledge for removing ignorance, the cause for *karman*. It is only through ignorance that the individual mutually superimposes the *ātman* with the mind/body complex (*upādhi*), and the *upādhi* with the *ātman*.

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[65] BSbh 3.4.27 (Gambhirananda 1996, p. 785). Also see BSbh 3.4.26.

[66] This split is also the underlying justification for the *Brahmasūtras* as a separate text from the PMS. The Mīmāṁsakas do not make this separation.

Superimposition creates the false belief that one's self is a finite mind-body complex subject to suffering, old age, death, and rebirth. This sense of limitation engenders fear and produces a desire for security and wholeness, which then prompts the individual to pursues various means and ends to quell fear and find absolute security. Unfortunately all means and ends found in the world, such as gaining health, wealth, power, prestige, and family are all similarly limited. They are products of desire-motivated action, finite in breadth and transitory. It is not possible for a finite action to produce an infinite result. And liberation by definition has no end or limitation, and thus cannot be a product of action.

All pursuits requiring action create seen (*dṛṣṭa*) and unseen (*adṛṣṭa*) results (*phala*). The seen results are clearly evident in terms of cause and effect. The unseen results of actions, such as the performance of ritual or virtuous moral action, accrue to the individual and manifest in the future based on their unseen power (*apūrva śakti*) to generate results. Mīmāṁsā holds that all events are to some small or large extent influenced by unseen (*adṛṣṭa*) force. Advaita categorizes the *adṛṣṭa* karmic results into three categories. The unseen results of action (*adṛṣṭa phala*) that cause one's birth and continues manifesting in this life is "already begun *karman*" (*prārabdha karman*). *Adṛṣṭa phala* that is continuously created and accruing during one's life is *āgāmi karman*. And the sum total of one's *adṛṣṭa karma-phala* from infinite previous lives is *saṁcitta karman*. *Saṁcitta karman* is analogous to one's total bank account of unmanifest results of *karman*. In each lifetime some portion of this account is doled out to the individual

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[67]Ramprasad 2000, p. 5.

and gains the status of *prārabdha*. There is virtually no beginning or end of *saṁcitta karmna* because we have accrued *karman* over infinite past lifetimes and continue to do *karman* and produce new *adṛṣṭa karma-phala* on a daily basis. Śaṅkara believes that, while there are ways to neutralize certain negative *karmas* through expiatory action (*prayascitta karman*) and one can avoid action to a small degree, it is not possible to live such an actionless life that all of one's *karman* would be burned up.[68]

The ignorant person naively continues to pursue limited actions with the false assumption that acquiring a few more things will culminate in security. Pursuing objects of desire requires action, which then creates new *adṛṣṭa phala* for our *saṁcitta karman* repository. The accumulation of *adṛṣṭa phala* propels us into future births to enjoy or suffer the results of our actions. However, even though *karman* is the obvious culprit of rebirth, individuation, and suffering, it is not the root cause. The root cause is ignorance (*avidyā*). *Karman* is dependent on this ignorance, and is thus not opposed to it or capable of removing it. In keeping with this distinction of ignorance and *karman* as a kind of cause and effect, Śaṅkara emphasizes the necessity of knowledge to remove ignorance. He writes:

> Ignorance, which is non-manifestation, is the opposite of knowledge, which is manifestation; but action is not the opposite of ignorance, and is therefore entirely different from knowledge. Ignorance, whether it means the want of knowledge, or doubt, or a false notion, is always removable by knowledge, but not by action in any of its forms, for there is no contradiction between ignorance and action.[69]

[68] BG 2.4-5, 18.3, and 18.11.
[69] BUbh 3.3.1. (Madhvananda 1993, p. 314).

As I will elaborate in the next section, Śaṅkara asserts that knowledge is the only means to remove ignorance . Knowledge is not an action, and thus it does not produce new results or generate any kind of *karman*.

Śaṅkara, following Mīmāṃsā, divides action into four nonoverlapping categories. An action can attain something or reach a destination (*āpti* or *gati*), modify something (*vikāra*), purify something (*saṃskāra*), or produce something (*utpatti*).[70] Śaṅkara asserts that none of these categories of action can result in liberation because action cannot destroy ignorance and stands opposed to the nature of liberation. For example, in BUbh 3.3.1, Śaṅkara refutes an opponent who questions if liberation can result from one of the four action types:

> (Liberation) cannot be produced because it is eternal. Therefore it also is not modified. And thus also because its nature is not a thing (used as) a means, it is not purified. For an object whose nature is a means is purified, such as a vessel or clarified butter, etc. by sprinkling. Nor is (liberation) purified or like the sacrificial post to be brought about by purification. Nor indeed is it gained because (liberation) is the nature of one's self and because it is one (identical with one's self).[71]

A key concept alluded to in the passage, and underlying Śaṅkara's type of rejection of action and his understanding of liberation, is his identification of liberation with *brahman*. If liberation possesses the same intrinsic nature as *brahman,* then it also

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[70] I'm not sure where this division first appears in Mīmāṃsā literature. A. B. Keith gives a reference to Prabhākara's *Prakaraṇapañcikā* (Keith 1978, p. 88fn –reprint of 1921 edition), which deals with the third chapter of PMS and the topic of deciding what is primary and subsidiary in a ritual.

[71] *na tāvat utpādyaḥ nityatvāt; ata eva avikāryaḥ; asaṃskāryaś ca ata eva asādhanadravyātmakatvāc ca sādhanātmakaṃ hi dravyaṃ saṃskriyate yathā pātrājyādi prokṣaṇādinā; na ca saṃskriyamāṇaḥ, saṃskāranirvartyo vā yūpādivat….na āpyo 'pi ātmasvabhāvatvāt ekatvāc ca* (my translation).

See Śaṅkara on BSbh 1.1.4 (Gambhirananda 1996, pp. 28, 32) for more explanation that liberation is not produced, nor can the self be the locus of any action or subject to any action because then *brahman* would become impermanent.

lacks all qualities, dualities, and limitations, and exists in the past, present, and future because it is not limited by time. The eternality of liberation removes it from the domain of action, which can only take place in time and result in time-limited effects. Secondly, the eternality of liberation, and its equivalence to *brahman*, means it is immediately present and so accessible to the seeking individual to be – in a seeming paradox – already accomplished.

Such assertion of one's self as already liberated, due to one's self-luminous nature as *brahman*, is one of the cornerstones of the entire Advaita philosophy. It dismantles the whole pursuit of action, whatever be the practical teaching for the seeker. There is no need to gain, produce, purify, or modify your self or anything else because you already are what you seek to be. The Advaitic pursuit is the paradoxical task of accomplishing what is already accomplished. This is not an "accomplishment" through actions and results because in reality there is nothing to accomplish in that sense. "Pursuing", "gaining", and "accomplishing" liberation are only used metaphorically.[72] In reality it is simply the recognition of one's own true nature. The whole preoccupation with trying to transform one's self is missing the point. It is like a sugar crystal assuming it is bitter and believing it needs to transform itself through action to become sweet. The paradox of seeking liberation is that it is already present.

The thesis of liberation as already present as one's self, and its distinction from action, sets up Śaṅkara's basic refutation of the Pūrvamīmāṃsaka's conception of heavenly liberation. Śaṅkara characterizes their notion of liberation as a winning of

heavenly worlds by performing certain actions and avoiding others.[73] But according to Śaṅkara, this liberation must be limited by time. Śaṅkara notes the following passage from CU 8.6.1.

> And as here in this world the possession of a territory won by action comes to an end, so in the hereafter a world won by merit comes to an end. So, those here in this world who depart without having discovered the self and these real desires do not obtain complete freedom of movement in any of the worlds, whereas those here in this world who depart after discovering the self and these real desires obtain complete freedom of movement in all the worlds.[74]

This passage clearly states the limitations of *karman* for securing liberation. Karmic merit (*puṇya*) comes to an end. In reality going to heaven is like a long vacation. Just as time and money runs out during a vacation, so too does *puṇya* run out for individuals in heaven. Eventually they will return to a worldly existence.[75] Śaṅkara further critiques the Mīmāṃsaka's "liberation" as subject to a gradation of happiness and sorrow. He analyses of various levels of happiness resulting from action (*ānandamīmāṃsā*) as described in TU 2.8 and BU 4.3.33.

> Had liberation been spoken of (in the scriptures) as supplementary to action and had it been asserted as a thing to be achieved, it would become impermanent. In that case liberation would become some sort of an excellent product amidst a horde of above-mentioned products of work standing in a graded order, but all who believe in liberation admit it to be eternal. Thus (since liberation is the same

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[72] See Śaṅkara on TUbh 2.1.1, BUbh 3.3.1, and BSbh 4.3.14.
[73] Śaṅkara may not be giving an accurate description of Mīmāṃsā's view of liberation. See Ram-Prasad (2000) for a discussion of Kumārila's understanding of liberation. According to Ram-Prasad, Kumārila is well aware of the type of critique Śaṅkara gives in terms of the limitations of action. Kumārila sidesteps this critique by saying liberation is the absence of karmic bondage. And he does not claim a positive result produced by action. In some ways this parallels the same type of argument Advaita makes in saying knowledge is the destruction of ignorance and not a positive production.
[74] CU 8.6.1 (Olivelle 1996, p.167).
[75] See also BU 3.8.10 and MU 1.9.

as *brahman*), it is not proper to talk of *brahman* as through it formed a factor in some action (BSbh 1.1.4).[76]

Here Śaṅkara comments that individuals experience a gradation of sorrow and happiness based on the results of their virtuous or prohibited actions. Different results for actions are clearly articulated in the Upaniṣads such as the southern and northern routes to be taken after death or the descriptions of different heavenly realms one can reach. These realms attained after death have different grades of happiness. Denizens of higher realms possess bodies capable of experiencing more happiness (*ānanda*) than those in lower realms. Śaṅkara insists the heavenly results resulting from virtuous deeds are entirely distinct from liberation because there cannot be any gradation of happiness and sorrow with reference to *brahman*. *Brahman* is not subject to a body that experiences happiness and sorrow, and when an individual recognizes the self as *brahman* then he or she is also not subject to this variation. In fact, self-knowledge removes any sense of agency. A sense of agency opposes the nature of *brahman* and is the presupposition of all action.[77]

2.1.3: The Relationship of Knowledge and Action in Advaita

The conflict between Advaita and Mīmāṃsā is based on different conceptions of liberation and of different means thereto. Advaita and Mīmāṃsā agree that action and knowledge are somehow mutually exclusive, but disagree on which to stress as the means for the *summum bonum*. On one extreme we find Mīmāṃsakas such as Kumārila Bhaṭṭa who champion *karman*. On the other, we find Śaṅkara rejecting *karman* and

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[76] BS 1.1.4. (Gambhirananda 1996, p. 28).

emphasizing the autonomy of self-knowledge. A number of other traditions, particularly other Vedānta traditions, formed views with other mixes of Śaṅkara and Kumārila's positions, and emphasized some combination of action and knowledge (*karmajñānasamuccaya*) as soteriological means. Those who espouse a combination of action and knowledge (*karmajñānasamuccayavādins*) form a whole spectrum of views varying with the relative importance placed on action or knowledge. The basic questions regarding the combination of action and knowledge are: Does action or knowledge receive the greater emphasis in terms of its causal efficacy for liberation? And what relationship do these two variables have to each other? Let me explain:

These questions parallel a basic Mīmāṃsā analysis of Vedic ritual. Rituals, such as the full moon sacrifice (*pūrṇamāsa*), require a main ritual as well as smaller secondary rituals. The primary ritual is the focus, but the primary ritual cannot be effective unless the certain subsidiary rituals are also performed.[78] Mīmāṁsakas developed methods to decide which rituals are primary or subsidiary and how they are related to each other in terms of chronology, method, and results. Vedāntins applied similar methods to questions about the relationship of action and self-knowledge to determine which is the main (*pradhāna*, *aṅgin*, or *śeṣin*) and which is the subsidiary (*guṇa*, *aṅga*, or *śeṣa*) given liberation as the goal. We can split this spectrum into five basic positions: 1) the Pūrvamīmāṃsā position placing all emphasis on action; 2) an emphasis on action which also requires self-knowledge as a subsidiary; 3) an equal emphasis on action and self-

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[77] See BSbh 1.1.4 (Gambhirananda 1996, p. 44).

[78] See chapter 3 of the PMS for a lengthy discussion of how to decide what is primary and subsidiary.

knowledge together; 4) an emphasis on self-knowledge with action as a subsidiary; and 5) a total emphasis on autonomous self-knowledge.

Positions two, three, and four encompass *karmajñānasamuccaya* traditions. Though antecedent writing is mostly lost, we know from references in commentarial texts that a number of pre-Śaṅkara philosophers such as Bhāskara, Bhartṛprapañca (self-knowledge and rites),[79] Brahmānandin (self-knowledge and *upāsanā*),[80] and Brahmadatta (self-knowledge and *prasaṅkhyāna*)[81] held varying forms of *karmajñānasamuccaya*.[82] These philosophers attempted to include both self-knowledge and action in order to accommodate the diverse views found in the Upaniṣads. A central concern is maintaining Vedic ritual in line with Mīmāṃsā along with an emphasis on mental action in the form of meditation and *upāsanā*. For some *karmajnanasamuccayavādins*, meditation and *upāsanā* alone are viewed as essential for immediate liberating *brahmavidyā*. Others combine physical ritual along with meditation and some form of propositional self-knowledge, or focus only on ritual action in combination with propositional self-knowledge. In addition, some *karmajñānasamuccayavādins* insist that even after direct *brahmavidyā* takes place there is still a requirement to continue performing actions whether ritual, meditative, or contemplative. Śaṅkara disagrees with all of these positions.[83]

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[79] Nakamura 1999, pp. 128-152.
[80] Nakamura 1999, p. 102.
[81] Nakamura 1999, p. 181-184.
[82] Their writing is mostly lost, though we find references to them in commentarial texts
[83] BSbh 1.1.4. Also see BUbh 3.3.1 for a refutation of combining action and knowledge (specifically the combination of *karma yoga* and meditation).

A critical question is whether the subsidiary variable functions directly or indirectly (or as an independent or dependent means) towards liberation. Is the subsidiary functioning in tandem or simultaneously with the primary as a cause for liberation, or does the subsidiary only function indirectly by helping the function of the primary variable? For the Mīmāṃsaka, propositional self-knowledge is only indirectly helpful by showing how to do a ritual and why it will be efficacious. Some of the *karmajñānasamuccayavādins* claim that mental actions such as meditation, rather than ritual actions, are directly instrumental to liberation. This position was particularly disconcerting to Śaṅkara because it elevates mental action to a means of self-knowledge and begins to blur the line between action and and the proper source of self-knowledge.

Śaṅkara discusses the separation of action and knowledge in general and in the specific case of *brahmavidyā* in order to discount action and place full importance on self-knowledge gained through the Upaniṣads. However, his intention is not to exclude action completely from the Advaitin's spiritual path. For the Advaitin, action is not absolutely negated. It is an indirect subsidiary, which helps align the *pramāṇa* and facilitate the cognitive process.[84] Action is not a direct cause for *brahmavidyā*, but is a requirement for properly employing a *pramāṇa*. For example, if I want to look at a particular object I require a set of conditions. The object has to be within sight, my eyes have to be open, and I may need to turn a light on. A whole set of actions may be necessary to create the proper conditions and align the *pramāṇa* in order for perceptual knowledge to take place. In the case of self-knowledge, mental actions, not physical

ones, are of primary importance for aligning the *pramāṇa*. Śaṅkara places these actions in a specific category of cultivating mental purity (*antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi* or *citta-śuddhi*), which gives the student the proper qualification (*adhikāritva*) for liberation. These actions are essential practices, but they are fundamentally different the knowledge process leading to *brahmavidyā*, which is dependent on the Upaniṣads. The following section outlines the process of gaining mental purity.

2.2.1: The Qualified Student (*adhikārin*)

In order for self-knowledge to take place, certain mental qualifications are required. Many minds are simply not prepared for certain types of knowledge. For example, a young child cannot study calculus. That child must first begin with arithmetic, algebra, etc., and only after years of preparation can the child move on to advanced mathematics. Similarly, the Advaita student must be prepared to gain self-knowledge. Even if a means of knowledge is operating, such as the Upaniṣads, the mind will not gain self-knowledge if it is lacking in ability or incapacitated by obstructions like distraction or agitating emotions. Therefore it is important to understand the necessary mental qualifications that make a qualified student (*adhikārin*) who is able to gain self-knowledge. Śaṅkara classifies the predispositions or qualities required for self-knowledge into four major categories (*sādhanacatuṣṭaya*). These include: (1) discrimination

[84]BUbh 4.4.22 and BS 3.4.26-7, 4.1.16; 4.1.18.

(*viveka*); (2) dispassion (*vairāgya*); (3) the six-fold qualification (*śamādisādhanasampatti*); and (4) the desire for liberation (*mumukṣutva*).[85]

The first quality described by Śaṅkara is *viveka* or discrimination. *Viveka* is the "discernment between what is eternal (*nitya*) and non-eternal (*anitya*)."[86] Every object one may acquire is bound by time and impermanent. One cannot gain permanent satisfaction from an impermanent object. In their ignorance of this limitation, people pursue new objects after the first fails to provide any lasting satisfaction, creating a cycle of false hopes and disappointment.[87] For the *adhikārin*, *viveka* is the discernment that all objects are time-bound, and unable to give lasting happiness. By gaining *viveka*, an individual shifts his or her pursuit towards the ever-present self. Only then can inquiry into reality commence. *Viveka* provides the impetus for realizing the self because the student recognizes that all prior actions were performed in ignorance. *Viveka* is the ability to separate all entities and attributes from the self. This is a process of distinguishing the *ātman* from the *anātman*, and includes the differentiation of the body and mind from the self.

The second quality of *adhikāritva* is *vairāgya* or dispassion. *Vairāgya* is a mental disposition characterized by the absence of longing for all seen or unseen time-bound objects of enjoyment.[88] This is a result of *viveka*. The desire for objects is vitiated when one knows they are incapable of yielding lasting fullness, which is indeed the nature of

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85 BSbh 1.1.1. See BU 4.4.23 and BS 3.4.27, which shows that the phrase *śamadamādi* was already prevalent by Bādarāyana's time.
86 *nityānityavastuvivekaḥ* (BSbh 1.1.1).
87 KUbh 2.1.2.

one's self.[89] This leads to an objective and dispassionate mind, unattached to the objects of enjoyment. For example, In the *Kaṭḥa Upaniṣad*, young Nāciketas displays great *vairāgya* when rejecting Lord Yama's offers of wealth, land, and divine women with chariots and musical instruments, in favor of self-knowledge. Naciketas responds in KU 1.1.26, "O Death, ephemeral are these, and they waste away the vigour of all the organs that a man has. All life, without exception, is short indeed. Let the vehicles be yours alone; let the dances and songs be yours."[90]

The fourth quality of the *adhikārin* is *śamādisādhanasampatti*.[91] This is a collection of six qualities, including *śama* (mental control), *dama* (control of the organs of action and perception), *uparati* (withdrawal), *titikṣā* (fortitude), *samādhāna* (focus), and *śraddhā* (trust).[92] Śaṅkara defines *śama* as control of internal organ (the mind). It is a natural result of both discrimination and dispassion.[93] As one's mind gains objectivity there is a parallel increase in *śama*, a disposition of calm and restraint. Mental agitation, which results from likes and dislikes, is alleviated when a false value is not projected

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88 *ihāmutrārthbhogavirāgaḥ* (BSbh 1.1.1).
89 BGbh 6.35
90 Gambhirananda 1995, p. 127.
91 See USG 2, BU 4.4.23 (in which the nominal forms *śama* and *dama* and *samādhāna* are given as the past participles *śānta*, *dānta* and *samāhita*.
92 Śaṅkara must have derived this group from BU 4.4.23 (*tasmād evaṁvic chānto dānta uparatas titikṣuḥ samāhito bhūtvātmany evātmanaṁ tarati*). In this version, the Kāṇva recension, there is no mention of *śraddhā*. However, the phrase *śraddhāvitto* is in the Mādhyandina recension. He must have seen this and added *śraddhā* to the group.

Śaṅkara does not always mention the six-fold qualities all together as a group, but it became a stock phrase in later Advaita. For example, see *Vedāntasāra* 1.15-26.
93 BGbh 6.3, 10.4, 16.1, 18.43.

onto objects. This is viewed not as a mental restraint based on forceful willpower, but rather as a natural disposition that is based on the unfolding of self-knowledge .[94]

Dama is the ability to control and restrain the sense organs (taste, hearing, smell, sight, and touch) and organs of actions (speaking, grasping, moving about, procreating, and evacuating).[95] The control of the organs through an act of will is necessary when a disposition of calm and restraint is lacking. Often times the mind is difficult to control, and powerful emotions such as fear, hatred, and anger can easily possess or hold the individual's mind in their sway. *Dama* is needed to control the action that these emotions can manifest. For example, it is not suitable to lash out every time anger is experienced, though it may also be unhealthy to suppress anger. Releasing anger in a healthy unharmful way is accomplished when the mind has control of the organs. This ability can only be accomplished with a high degree of awareness to emotional reactions.
Without strengthening the mind and developing will power, the senses and organs of action are uncontrollable like wild horses and cannot be directed to the pursuit of self-knowledge.[96]

Uparati is a type of withdrawal, where external objects do not affect the mind. It is a continuation of *śama* and *dama* to a further degree and implies that the individual does not hold the notion of personal possession. *Titikṣā* is fortitude, and the patient endurance of suffering. People who have *titikṣā* are able to withstand the opposites such

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[94] Rambachan 1991.
[95] *bāhyendriyopaśamaḥ* (BGbh 10.4). See BGbh 16.1, 18.43.
[96] The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* illustrates the control of the sense organs with the well-known chariot analogy which compares the sense organs to the horses. See KU 1.3.3-9.

as hot and cold, light and dark, and pain and pleasure.[97] When such difficulties are experienced one should not lament, dwell on them, or be disturbed by them.[98] *Titikṣā* is not simply the emotional ability to bear pain. It includes a state of calm and objectivity directed towards any type of suffering.[99] *Samādhāna* is the ability to keep the mind focused and single pointed (*ekāgratā*) upon an object.[100]

The last quality of the six-fold qualification is *śraddhā*, often translated as trust or faith. *Śraddhā* is vital element of *adhikāritva*. The one with *śraddhā* gains self-knowledge.[101] At the outset, the knowledge of non-duality is completely incongruous and diametrically opposed with common experience. People do not experience themselves to be infinite of fully content, and they require *śraddhā* to comprehend subtle topics such as *brahman*.[102] The confusion must be resolved by an experienced teacher who can facilitate *śraddhā* by using rational arguments and the student's experiences as a foundation for proper inquiry. *Śraddhā* is trusting the Vedānta teaching as a valid means of knowledge. This is the proper approach to *śruti*, without which the teaching will lack transformative power and become incapable of conveying self-knowledge.[103] The Advaitin should trust the teacher and the Upaniṣads just as one has total trust in his eyes to convey visual perception. *Śraddhā* facilitates an open and willing mind without

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[97] BGbh 2.14-15.
[98] BGbh 2.15.
[99] I do not believe that Śaṅkara's intention is that that people ought to ignore or disregard emotional and physical pain in al situations. If possible, negative situations should be changed for that is the role of action, but *titikṣā* is necessary when a given situation or the result of an action cannot be changed or is out of one's control.
[100] US 17.23.
[101] BG 4.39.
[102] CUbh 6.12.2.

sacrificing firm judgment, enabling the *śruti* to reveal the self. This would not be blind faith, but trust, pending verification through one's self-knowledge. The goal of self-knowledge is still placed under the scrutiny of rational thought.

The fourth quality of the *adhikārin* is *mumukṣutva*. This is the burning desire for liberation that drives an individual single pointedly to pursue self-knowledge to the exception of all other pursuits and distractions. A common illustration for the *mumukṣu* is a person who discovers his hair on fire while sitting on a riverbank. At that moment all activities cease in the mind, except for the dire need to run into the water to douse the fire. The enlightened teacher should teach such a person endowed with the qualities of *adhikāra*.[104]

2.2.2: Gaining Purity of Mind (*antaḥkaraṇa śuddhi*)

The primary way of achieving the qualities of the *adhikārin* is through methods for purity of mind (*antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi*). Prior to describing the methods for gaining mental purity, it is necessary to briefly overview the Advaitic conception of mind. The *antaḥkaraṇa* is translated as the inner instrument because it is more subtle than the sense organs and the organs of action. For example, people are aware of their capacity for eyesight because the mind can objectify the eyes. The mind is flexible and almost transparent, constantly in movement and taking the form of various thought modifications (*vṛttis*). The subtlety of the mind is apparent by the speed and ease in which it can modify objects of opposite natures. Advaita divides the mind into four major aspects,

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[103] BGbh 9.3.
[104] MUbh 1.2.13.

including the *ahaṅkāra* (I notion or ego), *manas* (sense mind), *buddhi* (intellect), and *citta* (function of recollection).[105]

The *ahaṁkāra* is the sense of one's finite self, produced from the erroneous identification with mind and body due to superimposition. The *manas* enables the mind to come into contact with the sense organs and assimilate the objects of perception. Although *manas* synthesizes sense impressions, because it does not have the discriminating capacity to make proper use of them it is often associated with doubt.[106] The *buddhi* is the decision-making faculty and the discriminating capacity to discern and decisively make use of the objects of perception. Understanding and knowledge take place through the *buddhi's* reasoning power.[107] The fourth division of the mind is the *citta*, the faculty of recollection. *Citta* is the *antaḥkaraṇa* in its state of referring to or remembering a past event.[108]

The mind is the instrument that removes ignorance when employing the Upaniṣads as a means of knowledge. Unfortunately, almost every individual has numerous obstacles in the mind that blocks self-knowledge arising from a *pramāṇa*. Knowledge of one's true self is an extremely difficult pursuit because of mental obstacles such as habitual thinking, emotional pain, and distraction. In order to correctly approach the *śruti* as a means of knowledge, the mind must resolve its obstructions and acquire the qualities of the *adhikārin*.

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105 Datta 1960.
106 Indich 1980.
107 Indich 1980.
108 Datta 1960.

The state of being a qualified student (*adhikāritva*) can be accomplished only when the mind has gained *antaḥkaraṇa śuddhi*. The pure mind has composure, is capable of understanding *śruti*, and has a strong faculty for *viveka*. There are various methods to gain *antaḥkaraṇa śuddhi* depending on the needs of the individual. The *Kena Upaniṣad* 4.8 describes some of these means: "Concentration, cessation from sense-objects, rites, etc., are its legs, the Vedas are all its limbs; truth is its abode." This verse also reiterates the subsidiary process of *adhikāritva* to the goal of self-knowledge.[109] The following section outlines some important means advocated by Śaṅkara for gaining *antaḥkaraṇa śuddhi*. These processes are important to understand because the results of purity of mind and self-knowledge are often confused. Understanding the distinction between these two goals is essential in for a proper understanding of *nididhyāsana*, and differentiating *nididhyāsana* from such mental activities.

2.2.3: *Karma yoga*

According to Śaṅkara, a primary factor that plagues the minds of people, limiting their potential for *adhikāritva*, is their susceptibility to likes (*rāga*) and dislikes (*dveṣa*). The *Bhagavadgītā* states, "*Rāga* and *dveśa* are present with reference to sense objects. One should not come under their power, for they are his enemies."[110] A basic way an individual relates to the world is through *rāga* and *dveṣa*, where every object is one that he or she likes, dislikes, or is neutral towards. These judgments are not intrinsic attributes of the objects, but are simply within the mind of the individual. For example,

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[109] See BGbh 2.21 and 18.55.

[110] *indriyasyendriyasyārthe rāgadveṣau vyavasthitau* |

three people may have different relationships to the taste of apples. The first likes the taste, the second dislikes it, and the third has no preference. The apple cannot be the locus of opposing qualities of good and bad taste because they are mutually exclusive. Thus the preference in taste is subjective and solely within an individual's mind.

In Śaṅkara's view, people spend their time mainly chasing objects to gain happiness or avoiding objects that make them unhappy. This is constant, except during deep sleep, and creates tremendous mental anxiety. If the number of objects pursued and avoided could be finite then the problem could be solved. Eventually all desires could be fulfilled and one could be immersed in ultimate satisfaction. Unfortunately this is not the case because new desires continuously arise. The subjective nature of the individual is in constant flux, causing his or her tastes, preferences, and needs to change daily. Likes and dislikes do not end by simply attempting to fulfill them, and in reality there is a continuous overwhelming deluge of *rāga* and *dveṣa* that is impossible to satisfy.

In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Kṛṣṇa repeatedly urges Arjuna to attain a mind devoid of this disruptive attachment. People deny their intrinsic nature of *ānanda* in the process of continually seeking objects other than their self. Attachment to *rāga* and *dveṣa* cause angst in the mind because the mind cannot remain at ease while continuously running towards or away from objects. The subjection to *rāga* and *dveṣa* allows even trivial daily occurrences to cause emotional upset, further obstructing the mind's ability to gain self-knowledge. [111]

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tayor na vaśam āgacchet tau hy asya paripanthinau || BG 3.34 (my translation).

[111] BGbh 2.60, 2.62-3, 3.34, 18.27.

The happiness of a person, who is not liberated, depends on the fulfillment of *rāga* and *dveṣa*, but for the liberated person, even though likes and dislikes may still be present, happiness is not dependent on their fulfillment. Self-knowledge cannot be gained when one's happiness is dependent on *rāga* and *dveṣa*, but only the liberated person has resolved this problematic attachment.[112] This poses a paradoxical problem for the student because self-knowledge and the resolution of attachment to likes and dislikes are both dependent on each other. The solution is not to eliminate *rāga* and *dveṣa*, but to gain an attitudinal change. If an attitudinal change takes place in the mind, then *rāga* and *dveṣa* can be neutralized and self-knowledge can take place. This is accomplished through *karmayoga*.[113]

Karmayoga can be described through the terms *īśvarārpana buddhi* (intention of offering to īśvara) and *prasāda buddhi* (intention of acceptance). *Īśvara-arpana-buddhi* is an attitude where every action is performed as an offering to *īśvara* (god).[114] *Prasāda-buddhi* is an attitude of acceptance of the results of action which leads to a serene equipoised mind.[115] The intrinsic nature of life includes activity, but people have little power over the results of action because many variables affecting the results are outside of an individual's control. According to Śaṅkara, the fruits of action must be accepted because they are distributed by *īśvara* in accord with the order of the universe.[116] This is similar to the way devotees accept *prasāda* ((literally "grace"), the food offered to the

[112] BGbh 2.57.
[113] See Rambachan 1991, p. 92-5 for a good overview of *karma yoga*.
[114] BGbh 3.9, 3.30, 5.10-12, 12.6.
[115] BGbh 2.65.

deity in brahmanical rituals. This food is redistributed to people after being blessed by the deity, and one should accept it graciously and without objection because it is sacramental. This type of acceptance must be extended to all results of action in life. The action is the offering and the result is the *prasāda*.

Karma yoga does not imply action taken without intention or expectation for results. However, instead of engaging action with an attachment for the result, the result should be accepted whether or not the intention is fulfilled.[117] Likewise, people performing religious rights should not be attached to the results of ritual, but rather see it as a way to purify the mind and lead to knowledge.[118] Regular or obligatory rites do not only refer to those necessitated in the duty of the *brāhmaṇa* priest. People must perform a variety of daily actions according to the obligations of family, work, and society.

With a *prasāda buddhi*, gained through *karma yoga*, there is a freedom from the judgment of success and failure, for even failure is *īśvara's prasāda*. *Rāga* and *dveṣa* do not agitate the mind when the student is free from judgment. When *rāga* and *dveṣa* are neutralized the mind gains a state of equipoise and equanimity, allowing the individual to appreciate the world and life with healthy objectivity.[119] This equanimity is a type of "skilfullness," a mental disposition that is ideal for meditation and contemplation and necessary for gaining self-knowledge.[120]

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[116] BGbh 2.47.
[117] BGbh 18.6.
[118] BUbh 3.3.1, BGbh 18.10, 18.24.
[119] BGbh 2.48.
[120] BGbh 2.50.

2.2.4: The Role of Meditation (*dhyāna*)

Rāga and *dveṣa*, along with the negative emotions they cultivate, and other obstacles such as self-criticism, distraction, and laziness, are some of the foremost stumbling blocks in the pursuit of self-knowledge according to Śaṅkara. A person may wish for a tranquil mind but is unable to control it and feels helplessly prone to its constant restless wandering. Arjuna famously compares controlling the mind to the difficulty of controlling the wind.[121] This is a problematic situation that is not conducive for self-knowledge. To counter this problem, the mind must be trained to become efficient and controllable.[122] A distracted mind moving in different directions, and buffeted by desires and disappointment cannot gain self-knowledge.[123]

Advaitins employs various types of meditation for harnessing the mind and gaining *adhikāritvam*. Śaṅkara does not elaborate on the varieties and methods of meditation. He accepts Yogic praxis[124] despite refuting aspects of Yoga and S āṅkhya metaphysics,[125] and assumes that one can look to the Yoga texts for more details. [126] He

[121] BG 6.34.
[122] BGbh 6.35.
[123] BGbh 2.62-3.
[124] BSbh 2.1.4, 1.4.1, 3.2.24, MU 3.1.
[125] The two basic points he refutes is the plurality of *jīvas* (BSbh 2.1.1) and the duality of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* (BSbh 1.1.5 and 2.2.1). He also disagrees that *īśvara* is solely the efficient cause (BSbh 2.2.37). Śaṅkara also disagrees with the use of meditation in Yoga's methodology. He does not agree that it leads to liberation and he does not agree that *samādhi* is synonymous with liberation (BSbh 2.1.3, BUbh 1.4.7, MUbh 3.39). Though he does accept *yogic siddhis* (BSbh 4.2.14; 4.4.15) and occasionally quotes Patañjali for support (BSbh 2.4.12; 4.1.10).
[126] For more details on Śaṅkara and Yoga see Sundaresan's chapter entitled "Yoga: The Indian Tradition," in Whicher and Carpenter 2003; Halbfass 1991, pp. 224-228; Nakamura 2004, pp. 734-767; Rukmani 2001, pp. 216-22 (Appendix II); Paul Hacker's "Śaṅkara the Yogin and Śaṅkara the Advaitin" in Hacker 1995; and Comans 1993, pp. 19-38.

does, however, spend considerable effort discussing a type of meditation termed *upāsanā*, which is prevalent throughout the Upaniṣads.

2.3: *Upāsanā*

Upāsanā is a special category of meditation used for mental purity (*antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi*), and is a practice that comes closest in appearance to *nididhyāsana*. There are numerous categories of *upāsanā* and various specific ones, which require different actions and produce different results. Many are quite technical and require deep knowledge of Vedic ritual as well as Upaniṣadic ontology. However, understanding nuances is unnecessary for the present discussion.[127] The following section is a brief outline of *upāsanā* practice, and a lengthier discussion of its relationship with *nididhyāsana* and self-knowledge. The ease with which *upāsanā* and *nididhyāsana* are conflated necessitates some discussion of their similarities and differences. This discussion also illumines some difficulties in trying to separate contemplative practice from other forms of mental action.

2.3.1: *Upāsanā* in Upaniṣadic Context

A common theme regarding Vedic ritual found in the Upaniṣads is symbolically locating the physical macrocosm within the sacrificial microcosm. This is usually facilitated through a theory of correspondence where physical categories have a correlate or prototype in the sacrificial framework. The Upaniṣads, in a spirit of philosophical

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[127]Śaṅkara describes *upāsanā* in numerous places, particularly throughout BS 3.3, which contains a vast discussion primarily concerned with looking at the diversity of *upāsanā* and finding some unity among them. The first five chapters of CU, TU chapter one, and various places in BU deal with *upāsanā*. For

reflection and inquiry, used this theme to develop other interpretations of ritual, particularly an interiorization of ritual, in which elements of the external ritual are symbolically homologized to elements internal to the sacrificer's body. Just as one imitates the physical macrocosm in the microcosm of the ritual, one can also conduct the physical ritual through bodily processes or mental activities, amounting to a form of 'self-sacrifice' (*ātmayajña*). In some contexts the Upaniṣads consider these interpretations to be extensions of the rituals, which imbue the ritual with greater soteriological efficacy. In other cases these reinterpretations are pushed so far that ritual is itself transcended and canceled out.[128]

Ritual interiorization is found throughout the Upaniṣads. For example, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* compares hunger and thirst to sacrificial consecration, eating and drinking to preparatory rites, and laughing, feasting, and sexual activity to chanting and recitation. Austerity, generosity, integrity, non-injury, and truthfulness are the gifts to the priests.[129] The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upani ṣad* compares a man's mouth to firewood, his breath to smoke, speech to flame, embers as sight, and sparks as hearing. The gods offer food into that and this sacrifice produces semen.[130] Another important example is

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more on *upāsanā*, see Bader 1990, pp. 32-40; Nakamura 1990, pp. 519-524; and Nakamura 2004, appendix B.

128 See Heesterman 1993, p. 215 and Kaelber 1989, p. 84.

The Upaniṣads contain some severe criticism of ritual in order to stress the importance of new soteriological goals and methods. See *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (MU) 1.2.7-9, 3.1.8, 3.2.6. See also *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (KU) 1.1.14-19 for an interesting example where the Nāciketas fire ritual (a ritual that Yama, the lord of death, teaches to Nāciketas, the main protagonist of the Upaniṣad) is glorified, yet inferior to knowledge of *brahman* because it only acquires a place in heaven. For other examples of criticizing rituals see BU 1.5.16; 6.2.14-15, CU 5.10.1-7, and PU 1.9-10.

129 CU 3.17.1-4

130 BU 6.2.12.

internalizing the fire ritual (*agnihotra*).[131] Fire is not only a fundamental element of virtually all Vedic ritual, but also lends itself to interiorization due to its manifestations as heat, energy/activity, anger, sexual desire, digestion, procreation, and asceticism in the Vedic world view.[132] Consumption of food itself became oblation to the digestive fires (*jātaveda*s). Internalized fire ritual also takes form as identifying the breath(s) (*prāṇa*s) as the sacred fires (*prāṇāgnihotra*).[133] Thus, one can use the breaths to convey oblations to deities. Just as food is offered as an oblation to the inner fire in the stomach, so too is food offered to the fires homologized as the *prāṇas*.[134] Or one may allow the breaths to become the object of the rite itself, in which case breathing alone becomes a continuous process of internal ritual activity.[135]

In many cases the Upaniṣadic homologies connect physiological processes and cosmic processes through the mediation of the ritual. By understanding the hidden connection of these homologies, the individual becomes identified with phenomena in the cosmic sphere.[136] In many cases the connection is not simply physical resemblance or equivalence but one born from etymological connections based on phonetic equivalence.

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[131] The internalization of fire in the Upaniṣads has its predecessor in earlier Vedic literature dealing with the *agnihotra*. Sometimes when traveling, a ritualist could not carry his fires and had to ritually deposit the fires within his self. See the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 3.4.10.5. One could also ritually deposit the fire in the fire sticks or into a piece of firewood. This practice probably became more common during the time of the Upaniṣads and later became part of the rite of passage into Brahmaṇical renunciation, except in that case one would never again rekindle the sacrificial fires. Instead, the body remained as the ritual domain for the rest of the renunciate's life. See Olivelle 1992, p. 86-89.

[132] Bentor 2000, p. 595

[133] See the section on *agnihotra* and *prāṇāgnihotra* in Bodewitz (1973) for a detailed discussion.

[134] See CU 5.18-24. The Upaniṣad also stresses the importance of knowing this special meaning of the fire sacrifice to gain the true power of the rite.

[135] See *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* 2.5 and PU 4.3.

[136] Olivelle 1996, p. liii, Brereton 1990.

The name of a thing expresses its essence, so phonetic similarity provides a means to understand their hidden connection.[137] For example, the *udgītha* (high) chant serves to connect the individual with the rising (*udyan*) sun.[138] In other cases physiology and cosmic processes are directly equated. For example, *prāṇa* (vital breath, exhalation, wind) already represents both the microcosm and macrocosm as breath and wind. As breath, it was considered a principle of life and longevity and associated with the cosmic element/deity of wind.[139] Such homologies based on finding equivalences and connections form types of ritual *upāsanā* performance that move away from simply supplicating heavenly deities and cosmic processes to superimposing identities on them. Establishing and maintaining the identity is itself the ritual performance. All this follows the natural philosophical trajectory of the Upaniṣads, towards an inquiry into deeper realities of both self and world, and leads to importance being attached to understanding and identifying the self (*ātman*), which is within and represents the supreme deity,[140] and *brahman*, which is the ultimate underlying foundation of all things, the absolute principle of reality, and the highest formulation of truth.[141]

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137 Olivelle 1996, p. liv

138 See CU 1.3.1, 1.11.7
The term *udgītha* possesses a somewhat stretched etymological connection with *udyan* (rising) based on the common prefix *ut*.

139 Zysk 1993, p. 202.

140 Bodewitz 1973, p. 328.

141 Though I use terms such as 'evolve' and 'lead', I am not sure whether there is actually a historical change moving in this order, nor am I suggesting that we can date layers of the Upaniṣads based on concepts which I isolate as changes, though such history is not ruled out. Śaṅkara, as a traditional exegete, takes a synchronic view of the texts and does not analyze the texts or assume a textual hierarchy based on chronological change.

This transition may or may not have been a gradual ideological movement, but it is clearly a dramatic conceptual break from the preceding ritual literature. The placing of fire within the self was one bridge for the evolution of the internalization. The fire hidden inside the body became identified with one's immortal self, the substratum or deepest part of the person. A similar transition takes place with a trope of light. In early Vedic literature the light of immortality was identified within, beyond, or behind the heavenly sun. In the Upaniṣads, meditations are prescribed to visualize oneself as identical with this light symbolized as the sun.[142] However, the Upani ṣad progresses further and identifies the light of immortality as self-light (*ātmajyotis*), subjective witnessing awareness of the individual, in the mainstream Advaita reading.[143] These examples demonstrate the Upaniṣadic method of using resemblance, equivalence, or intrinsic connection to relocate the source of immortality – such as heaven (the sun) or the sacrifice (fire) – to its true location within or as the individual self. Then the ultimate equation the Upaniṣads make is identity between this *ātman* so conceived and *brahman*.[144] The fire/self located in the individual is also identified with impersonal truth.[145] The light of immortality identified as one's self is understood as the conscious core of the individual as witnessing awareness and simultaneously identified as the immortal existential essence of all things.[146]

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[142] See CU 3.13.7, TU 2.8.5.
[143] BU 4.3.
[144] Olivelle 1996, p. lvi.
[145] Heesterman 1993, p. 217.
[146] See BU 4.4.7, 4.4.16-18, BSbh 1.3.40, CU 8.3.4

Scholars, both contemporary and classical Indian, contest what this equation means, what purpose it plays within Upaniṣadic literature, and in what sense and whether or not it is the ultimate goal or message of the Upaniṣads. Such debates of course led to the proliferation of numerous Vedānta traditions. However, for Advaitins like Śaṅkara, the identity of *ātman* and *brahman* is, at least in some sense, the paramount aim of the Upaniṣads. Knowledge of this identity is said to be the only means for liberation. But Śaṅkara faced a difficult task. The Upaniṣads label the various forms of homology and identities based on equivalence outlined above as *upāsanā*, (used synonymously with terms like *vidyā*). Śaṅkara, however, separates those that lead to lower knowledge through meditations on resemblance from those that lead to the highest goal of liberation (*mokṣa*) through contemplations of true identity.[147] He makes this crucial distinction among *upāsanā*s following his separation of action and knowledge.[148]

2.3.2: Śaṅkara's Method of *Upāsanā*

Upāsanā is a repeated mental meditative action that incorporates various forms of visualized concentration on two or more superimposed objects. The Sanskrit word has the meanings of "adoration," "worship," "service," "veneration," and "meditation." It literally means "sitting near" – from the prefix *upa* (near) and the verbal root *ās* (to sit).

[147] The Upaniṣads themselves do not make any formal reflexive categorization of *upāsanā*. Many other classical Indian philosophies as well as the *Brahmasūtras* do not make a categorization either. This becomes a point of contention, for some traditions such as Vasiṣṭha Advaita believe that *upāsanā* in the form of actions of worship or self-surrender can lead to liberation.

[148] It also follows the related distinction of empirical and absolute reality, and the division of Vedic literature into the *karmakānda* (dealing with ritual) and the *jñānakānda* (dealing with self-knowledge).

This derivation refers to the mind sitting near, or dwelling upon, a particular object such as a deity. The following are two brief definitions of *upāsanā* provided by Śaṅkara:

> *Upāsanā* is approaching with the mind, the natural form of a deity, etc., explained by the Upaniṣads in the *arthavāda* (explanatory) section dealing with the objects of *upāsanā*, and uninterruptedly concentrating on it without the intervention of conventional thoughts until there is a manifestation of a conception of one's self identified with the form of that deity like one's conventional self-identity.[149]

> *Upāsanā* is a flow of uniform thoughts according to the Upaniṣads, not inhibited by dissimilar thoughts, and relates to an object said by the Upaniṣads. The meaning of the word *upāsanā* is well known among people (in sentences such as) 'He serves (or adores) the teacher,' 'He serves the king.' He who always serves the teacher, etc, he is said to be one who does *upāsanā*"[150]

In these passages *upāsanā* is thought to share similar fundamental characteristics with other forms of meditation (*dhyāna*) in that it is a stream of uniform thought-modifications repeated to the exclusion of all dissimilar thoughts.[151] This is compared to the uniform and constant flow of poured oil, which does not deviate or waver. As in *dhyāna*, the one performing *upāsanā* (the *upāsakā*) must possess a mind free of distraction. In fact *upāsanā* is to be practiced seated because the mind is distracted when walking, running,

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[149]*upāsanaṃ nāma upāsyārthavāde yathā devatādisvarūpaṃ śrutyā jñāpyate tathā manasopagamya, āsanaṃ cintanam, laukikapratyayāvyavadhānena, yāvat taddevatādisvarūpātmābhimānābhivyaktir iti laukikātmābhimānavat*/ BUbh 1.3.9 (my translation).

[150] *upāsanaṃ ca yathā śāstraṃ tulyapratyayasantatir asaṃkīrṇā cātatpratyayaiḥ śāstoktālambanaviṣayā ca / prasiddhaś copāsanaśabdārtho loke gurum upāste rājānam upāsta iti / yo hi gurvādīn santatam upacarati sa upāsta ity ucyate / sa ca phalam āpnoty upāsanasya* | TUbh 1.3.4 (my translation).

Śaṅkara gives an almost identical definition in his introduction to CU: "Whereas *upāsana* is taking some object *(ālambanam)* following as said in the text (*śāstra*), and maintaining a continuous current of the same though on that (object), not disturbed by any different thought." *upāsanaṃ tu yathāśāstrasamarthitaṃ kiñcid ālambanam upādāya tasmin samānacittavṛttisaṇtānakaraṇaṃ tadvilakṣaṇapratyayānantaritam* | CU introduction (my translation).

Also see BSbh 4.1.1.

[151] The "continuous stream" idea also comes up in TUbh 1.3.2-3, BGbh 12.3, BUbh 1.4.7, and BSbh 4.1.8-9 among other places. The analogy for this type of concentration is the concentrated mind of a heron hunting for fish, or a woman who has her mind fixed on her exiled lover (BSbh 4.1.8 and BSbh 4.1.1). This is also similar to what we find in the *Yoga Sūtras*. See Vyāsa's commentary on *Yoga Sūtra* 3.2.

or standing, and may fall asleep if lying down.[152] However, *upāsanā* is fundamentally different from many common forms of meditation, which may or may not consist of a secular thought. [153] For example, one can meditate on any object such as an image, a meaningless sound, or one's breath. In contrast, *upāsanā* only relates to objects enjoined in the Upaniṣads such as a deity or a Vedic chant and incorporates a sense of repeated devotion and worship. A similar attitude between a student and teacher, or minister and king, or a woman separated from her husband, is brought to *upāsanā*.[154]

The defining characteristic of *upāsanā* and its fundamental difference from other forms of meditation is its use of intentional superimposition. *Upāsanā* generally consists of identifying one object with another.[155] In many cases this takes the form of seeing one's self as X. Two of the primary types of *upāsanā* Śaṅkara refers to are *sampad upāsanā* and *adhyāsa upāsanā*. *Sampad upāsanā* is using a lower-order object or symbol and superimposing its qualities on a higher object or symbol through some type of resemblance. Through this superimposition of similarities, one raises the lower object or symbol to the higher one.[156] An example of *sampad upāsanā* comes in BU 3.1.9, "The mind is indeed infinite, and infinite are the *viśvadevas*. Through this meditation one wins an infinite world."[157] This *upāsanā* makes use of the similarity between the mind and the *viśvadevas* (a class of deities). The mind is infinite in terms of its forms and

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[152] BSbh 4.1.7.
[153] It is important to note that Śaṅkara does not employ these words in such a narrow sense. He often uses *dhyāna* and *upāsanā* interchangeably.
[154] Śaṅkara repeats this in BS 4.1.1.
[155] See CU 3.14.1 for shaping the conviction of identity and gaining the goal one is identified with.
[156] Gambhirananda 1992.
[157] Madhavananda 1993, p. 296.

modifications. This aspect of the mind is used as a connecting parallel to the infinite *viśvadevas*. By superimposing the *viśvadevas* onto the mind through this similarity, one develops a new mind identity, raising the mind to the level of the *viśvadevas*. In this *upāsanā* the focus is on the higher object so that the superimposed identity assumes the form of the *viśvadevas*. *Adhyāsa upāsanā* has an inverse focus compared to *sampad upāsanā*. Primacy is placed on the locus of *upāsanā* rather than the superimposed object. For example, in CU 3.18.1 we find the injunction to meditate on the mind as *brahman*.[158] Here the focus is on the mind not on *brahman*.[159]

The *upāsanā* presented in the Upaniṣads create a variety of results depending on the specific *upāsanā*. Some are performed at the same time as a physical ritual, such as the *agnihotra*. Śaṅkara explains that such *upāsanā*s are powerful auxiliaries for making rituals truly effective.[160] For example he writes:

> Now the meditations based on resemblance are being spoken of. By this is meant a meditation, by virtue of some point of resemblance, on rites with inferior results like the *agnihotra*, as rites with superior results, in order too obtain these results; or it is a meditation on some part of the lesser rite as those very results. Even when people try with all their ardour to undertake measures for bringing about

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158 Also see CU 7.32.

159 See Rambachan 1991, p. 82. Rambachan describes two other types of *upāsanā*; *kriyāyoga upāsanā* where two different actions are superimposed into identity based on their similarities of action, and *saṃskāra upāsanā* where *upāsanā* is used to purify the ritual agent to make him qualified for a particular ritual. There are many other categories of *upāsanā,* such as *pratīka* (sound symbols) and *pratimā* (physical objects or form symbols) meditations, those that use a sound or form as the locus of superimposition, such as superimposing Viṣṇu on a *śāligrāma* stone, or *saguṇa* (with attributes) *brahman* on to *om* meditations. There are others that focus on qualities of *brahman*, etc. Another distinction that is not clearly evident in these categories is that of *ahaṅgraha upāsanā*, where superimposition is onto one's I-notion or ego, verses external *upāsanas* where both the object and locus of *upāsanā* is external to the individual. Śaṅkara himself doesn't appear to make a formal categorization. See Gambhirananda's introduction to the CU and Nakamura 2004, appendix B, for attempts at categorizing *upāsanā.* For symbols (*pratīka*) and attributes (*guṇa-viśeṣa*) see Nakamura 2004, p. 739. Also see Olivelle's introduction to his translation of the Upaniṣads (Olivelle 1996, p. xlix-lvi).

160 For example, the *udgītha upāsanā* removes hindrances from the ritual and makes it more affective. See BSbh 3.3.42 and BSbh 4.1.19.

> certain ends, they may fail of their object through some defect. So a man who regularly tends the sacrificial fire takes up any rite, such as the *agnihotra*, that suits him, and if he happens to know the results of particular rites, achieves the results he seeks through meditation.[161]

Other *upāsanā*s help by destroying previously earned demerit (*pāpman*) or they may lead one to the highest realms of heaven. Certain *upāsanā*s can also lead to *krama-mukti* (gradual liberation or liberation by stages) where a person achieves a divine status, reaches the highest heavenly world (*brahma-loka*), and gains self-knowledge there.[162] Advaitins do not perform *upāsanā* to gain such results because such results are unrelated to gaining self-knowledge during one's lifetime. Their primary incentive for *upāsanā* is gaining steadiness of mind (*antaḥkaraṇa-naiścalyam*),[163] which helps develop *adhikāritvam* by removing obstacles to knowledge.[164]

It is not clear what role *upāsanā* played among Advaitins over the centuries. A number of contemporary Advaitins have reported to me that Upaniṣadic *upāsanās* are largely absent among today's orthodox practitioners. It is probably a broken tradition of teaching, though some may try to construct and practice *upāsanā* from the Upaniṣads. There are surely a number of historical reasons for all this. One may be the fact that these *upāsanās* depend on intimate knowledge of Vedic ritual but those rituals are rarely practiced today. It is not clear whether these *upāsanās* were seriously practiced during

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161 BUbh 3.1.6 (Madhavananda 1993, p. 293). Also see BSbh 3.3.42, and CU 1.1.10.

162 BSbh 3.2.21 and BUbh 1.5.16. For a more detailed discussion of the results of *upāsanā* see Nakamura 2004, pp. 744-8.

163 BS 4.1.9.

164 BSbh 4.1.19.

An attitude of *karma yoga*, where one holds an orientation of performing action as an offering to the highest deity, *īśvara* (*īśvarārpanabuddhi),* and graciously accepting the results of action as sacramental (*prasādabuddhi)* can also be applied to mental actions like *upāsanā*.

Śaṅkara's time either. However, many contemporary Advaitins continue to practice *upāsanās* that are not strictly found in the Upaniṣads, and it is possible that similar *upāsanās* were practiced even at Śaṅkara's time. Some forms of *upāsanā* practiced today are also intertwined with other forms of worship, including *bhakti* traditions, Śaivasiddhānta worship, Tantric imagery etc.

2.3.3: Comparing *upāsanā* and *nididhyāsana*

The similarities of *upāsanā* and *nididhyāsana* may be traced to a number of reasons. As already noted, they are both forms of mental action that rely on manipulating thoughts, and they share the qualities of concentration and repetition. In his introduction to the CU, Śaṅkara notes that both are presented in the Upaniṣads "because they are similar as secret and because they are similar as modifications of the mind. For there is the similarity that just as knowledge of non-duality is only a modification of the mind, so too do other *upāsanās* have the form of modifications of the mind."[165]

Some *upāsanās* have contents that appear strikingly similar to *nididhyāsana* on the surface. And even though they have important fundamental differences, as I will explain, they also have a core resemblance. *Upāsanā* can function as a precursor to *nididhyāsana*, and is a bridge between the physical actions of Vedic ritual and the assimilation of self-knowledge found in the Upaniṣads. According to Śaṅkara, it functions as an important interiorization of Vedic ritual, where entire rituals are completed purely mentally, without any reliance on physical and vocal actions. This

[165] *rahasyasāmānyān manovṛttisāmānyāc ca; yathādvaitajñānaṃ manovṛttimātraṃ tathānyāny apy upāsanāni manovṛttirūpāṇīty asti hi sāmānyam* | (my translation).

practice allows one to move away from physical ritual, develop skills for internal introspection, and transition towards the types of mental effort used in Advaita's contemplative pursuit of non-duality.[166] It is for this reason, according to Śaṅkara, that *upāsanā* forms the early chapters of some Upaniṣads. This is particularly evident in the oldest Upaniṣads, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya*. Śaṅkara explains this function of *upāsanā* in his introduction to the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*:

> These *upāsanā*s are helpful for the knowledge of non-duality because they (help) illumine the reality of the *vastu* (*brahman*) by providing mental purity, and they are easy to practice because their object is a thing/locus. Therefore they are stated at the beginning. Here, because the practice of ritual action is so deeply rooted, it is difficult to place the mind in meditation by giving up action. Thus *upāsanā*, which is a part of the ritual, is stated in the beginning (of the Upaniṣad).[167]

The similarities between *upāsanā* and *nididhyāsana* potentially lead to confusing them. Such confusion would be partly due to the terminological ambiguity of the Upaniṣads as well as the similarity of their practice. The Upaniṣads and Śaṅkara's corresponding commentaries do not specifically differentiate the terms used for *upāsanā*, *nididhyāsana*, and self-knowledge. In the Upaniṣads, *upāsanā* is often labeled as *jñāna*, *vijñāna* or *vidyā*, terms which also mean knowledge.[168] The synonymous use of these terms is confusing because they often refer to self-knowledge in the context of Advaita, not meditative actions like *upāsanā*. In other attestations, *upāsanā* does not refer to

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[166] I suspect that the self-superimposed broader cosmic identities in *upāsanā* also function to soften any rigid sense of self limited to the physical body. In this way *upāsanā* is a transitioning step to help students grasp their own non-dual identity.

[167] *tāny etāny upāsanāni satvaśudhikaratvena vastutattvāvabhāsakatvād advaitajñānopakārakāny ālambanaviṣayatvāt susādhyāni ceti pūrvam upanyasyanti | tatra karmābhyāsasya dṛḍhīkṛtatvāt karmaparityāgenopāsanā eva duḥkhaṃ cetaḥ samarpaṇaṃ kartum iti karmāṅgaviṣayam eva tāvad ādāv upāsanam upanyasyate* | CUbh introduction (my translation).

[168] For example, see BS 3.1.1, 3.3.5 and CU 5.3.7.

meditative action, but rather to the knowing process and *nididhyāsana*.[169] Śaṅkara addresses the common use of these terms in his commentary on BS 4.1.1 where he explains the similar usage of the verb roots *vid* (to know) and *upa+ās* (to worship, to meditate on).[170]

> It is seen in the Upaniṣads that the use of the verb roots *vid* and *upa+ās* are not different. Sometimes the text starts with the root *vid* and ends with the root *upa+ās*. For example "I say the same about he who knows that which (Raikva) knows"(CU 4.1.4). Later it says, "Oh Sir, teach me that *devatā* upon whom you meditate" (CU 4.2.2). Sometimes the text begins with the root *upa+ās* and ends with the root *vid*. For example, "One should meditate on the mind as *brahman*" (CU 3.18.1), and later, "he who knows this shines and blazes with fame, glory, and the splendor resulting from sacred knowledge" (CU 3.18.3).[171]

In the above passage and the following commentary, Śaṅkara points out that the Upaniṣadic usage of the verbs *upa+ās* and *vid*, and the associated practices, *upāsanā* and *nididhyāsana*, imply acts of repetition. Therefore, even though these words and the processes they refer to are different in important ways, they are used interchangeably by the Upaniṣads due to the similarity of required repetition.[172] Śaṅkara himself does not favor one term or the other, using them interchangeably, yet occasionally he makes a

[169] *Dhyāna* is also often used for *upāsanā* and occasionally as a synonym for *nididhyāsana*. See BG 13.24. Also "*dhyāyamānaḥ*" means *nididhyāsana* in MU 3.1.8. Śaṅkara glosses *nididhyāsanam* as *dhyānam* in BU 2.4.5.
[170] BS 4.1.1 states *āvṛttir asakṛd upadeśāt*: "Repetition is necessary, since the Upaniṣads instruct repeatedly" (Gambhirananda 1996, p. 813).
[171] *vidyupāsyoś ca vedānteṣv avyatirekeṇa prayogo dṛśyate kvacid vidinopakramyopāsinopasaṃharati yathā - 'yas tad veda yat sa veda sa mayaitad uktaḥ' ity atra 'anu mā etāṃ bhagavo devatāṃ śādhi yāṃ devatām upāssa iti | kvacic copāsinopakramya vidinopasaṃharati yathā 'mano brahmety upāsīta ity atra bhāti ca tapati ca kīrtyā yaśasā brahmavarcasena ya evaṃ veda iti |* (my translation).
[172] In addition, these terms may be employed interchangeably because they specifically refer to mental actions. *Nididhyāsana* is not discussed usually as a mental action because it is has knowledge as its content, however it overlaps with mental actions as meditation in terms of repetition and concentration. While *upāsanā* does not provide self-knowledge, it still depends on the *śruti* for its content, and in this sense deals with knowledge.

clear distinction. For example, in BSbh 4.1.12 Śaṅkara divides *upāsanā* into lower and higher ones that specifically lead to the proper vision of self-knowledge.[173]

In his commentaries on a number of important passages in the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavadgītā* we find Śaṅkara interpreting forms of the verb *upās* as *nididhyāsana*. For example, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* states, "One should meditate on the self alone" (*ātmety evopāsīta*).[174] According to Śaṅkara, this sentence uses the verb " *upāsīta*" in the context of gaining self-knowledge and repeated contemplation. The *Bhagavadgītā* contains passages such as, "However, those who contemplate (*paryupāsate*) on that which is imperishable, indescribable, and unmanifest…." [175] Here, the verb *paryupāsate* is used in the context of gaining knowledge and therefore Śaṅkara believes it refers to *nididhyāsana*. This is clear because the object of *paryupāsate* is *brahman* spoken of in absolute negative terms as without any attributes (*nirguṇa*). It is contrasted with the verb *upāsate*, in the previous verse (18.2), which lacks the *pari* prefix and refers to the *karma-yogin* performing action and *upāsana* meditations. *Pari* is prefixed to signify a totally committed contemplation on self-knowledge.[176]

In other places it is not clear whether the reference is to *upāsanā* or *nididhyāsana*. In these cases, it appears that depending on the student's level of understanding, the term *upāsanā* may be understood either as a meditation or as *nididhyāsana*. For example, if one meditates on *om* as a sound symbol (*pratīka*) then it is an *upāsanā* on the lower

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[173] *samyagdarśanārthany upāsanāni*

In other contexts Śaṅkara specifically separates the two by using both terms in proximity to each other. Also see BSbh 4.1.1.

[174] BU 1.4.7.

brahman with qualities (*aparam saguṇa-brahman,* i.e. *īśvara*).[177] *Om upāsanā* may be used at the lower level for helping rituals, for gaining the highest heavens,[178] or for purifying the mind, but if one understands the meaning of *om* as indicating knowledge of the higher unqualified *brahman* (*param nirguṇa-brahman*) then it functions like a *mahāvākya*, which directly reveals self-knowledge. When *om* is correctly understood as designating unqualified *brahman*, then it can be a source for repeated contemplation on self-knowledge. Repeating *om* while recognizing this understanding is *nididhyāsana*.[179] Even though there is a leap between *upāsanā* and *nididhyāsana* in terms of content, we can see a possible continuum, moving from meditation practice to contemplative assimilation of knowledge while using the same symbol or sentence.[180]

2.3.4: *Upāsanā* as Depending on the Person and *nididhyāsana* as Depending on the Object

Listening to texts (*śravaṇa*) and logical reflection (*manana*) possess some obvious differences from *upāsanā*. However, distinguishing the valid cognition present in

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175 *ye tv akṣaram anirdeśyam avyaktaṃ paryupāsate* (BG 12.3 a-b).

176 Also see BG 9.22, 12.6, 12.20 and 13.25.

177 This is a common form of *om* meditation. For example see Śaṅkara on BU 5.1.1 and BG 8.13. For meditation on *om* for helping ritual, see CU 1.1.9.

178 See BS 4.3.15 for *om* meditation leading to the highest heaven (*brahmaloka*).

179 An example of this two-fold approach to *om* is found in PU 5.1-7. See also KU 1.2.15-17 and MU 2.2.6. In the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* we find *om* used in the context of knowledge. There it indirectly points to *brahman* through *anvaya* and *vyatireka* as the constant awareness underlying all states of experience, and functions like a *mahāvākya*.

180 We can see this potential transition in the common Advaita and yogic practice of repeating a *mantra* (*japa*). For example, one can repeat "*Om*, salutations to Śiva" (*om namaḥ śivāya*) as a simple *japa* meditation. This can then transition to *upāsanā* if while repeating the *mantra* one visually superimposes the deity Śiva onto an object (like a *śiva liṅga*) or one's self, and gives salutations to that object or self. This *upāsanā* can subsequently transition to *nididhyāsana* if one recognizes the identity of Śiva (in terms of his non-dual existence and pure awareness), as one's self while repeating the *mantra*. This works only after exposure to the Advaita teaching, after which one can load the content of the *mahāvākya* on to a *japa mantra* or *upāsanā,* which is not strictly Upaniṣadic.

nididhyāsana and the visualized mental action inherent to *upāsanā* is confusing yet critical to Śaṅkara's entire methodology. The distinction is of essential importance for understanding *nididhyāsana*, as well as Śaṅkara's emphasis on the Upaniṣads as a means of knowledge and refutation of the thesis that self-knowledge is a new experience produced by meditation. The most important difference Śaṅkara draws between *upāsanā* and *nididhyāsana* follows the distinction of person dependent action (*puruṣatantra karma*) and object dependent knowledge (*vastutantra jñāna*). Śaṅkara's distinction of action as person-dependent and knowledge as object-dependent is part of his critique of action, and by extension *upāsanā*, as a means to self-knowledge.[181]

Śaṅkara's primary complaints against action, whether physical, vocal, or mental, as a direct cause for liberation are the time-bound nature of the products of action and the mutual autonomy of action and self-knowledge. Yet one may question how such criticism does or does not also target everyday knowledge. Cognition is similar to action, in that it takes place in time, and is an effect produced by various causal mechanisms and a means of knowledge such as perception or inference. As a product, it is also transitory and rapidly decays. This is clearly evident in our experience. Cognition, whether veridical or not or imaginative, reflective, etc., arises and then quickly disappears when a subsequent cognition arises. While there are numerous similarities between cognition and mental action, Śaṅkara makes a critical distinction between the two based on content-dependence. While action is dependent on an individual's will, veridical cognition is at

181 In addition, this distinction underlies the debates surrounding *nididhyāsana* that continue throughout the history of Advaita literature.

least ultimately dependent on the nature of the object. This distinction separates *upāsanā*, which is person-dependent (*puruṣatantra*), from *nididhyāsana*, which is object-dependent (*vastutantra*). Śaṅkara's concise explanation of this distinction of knowledge and action is worth quoting in full:

> Worldly and Vedic action can be performed, not performed, or performed otherwise, just as one goes by horse or by foot or does not go. But a thing cannot be imagined to be of such a kind, or a different kind, or to be non-existent. Options are dependent on the mind of the individual. Knowledge of the real nature of an object is not dependent on the mind of the individual. What then (does it depend on)? It is dependent on the object itself. Indeed, in the case of a stump, knowledge is not "This is a stump or this is a person or this is something else." "That is a person or something else" is incorrect cognition. "That is a stump alone" is knowledge in that it depends on the object. In this manner, the validity of cognition regarding existing objects is dependent on the object. This being so, knowledge of *brahman* is also only dependent on the object (*brahman*) because it is an existing thing.[182]

Śaṅkara raises this distinction specifically to differentiate gaining self-knowledge through *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* from any enjoined action, including meditations such as *upāsanā*.[183] Injunctions for action are only possible when there are

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[182] *kartum akartum anyathā vā kartuṃ śakyaṃ laukikaṃ vaidikaṃ ca karma, yathāśvena gacchati padbhyām anyathā vā, na vā gacchatīti |*
na tu vastv evaṃ naivam asti nāstīti vā vikalpyate | vikalpanās tu puruṣabuddhyapekṣāḥ | na vastuyāthātmyajñānaṃ puruṣabuddhyapekṣam | kiṃ tarhi vastutantram eva tat | na hi sthāṇāv ekasmin sthānur vā puruṣo 'nyo veti tattvajñānānāṃ bhavati | tatra puruṣo 'nyo veti mithājñānam, sthānur eveti tattvajñānaṃ, vastutantratvāt | evaṃ bhūtavastuviṣayāṇāṃ prāmāṇyaṃ vastutantram | tatraivaṃ sati brahmajñānam api vastutantram eva bhūtavastuviṣayatvāt | BS 1.1.2 (my translation).
Also see BSbh 1.1.4 and US 1.1.13.

[183] Many Vedāntins contemporaneous with Śaṅkara, particularly those that combined action and knowledge as necessary for liberation (*karmajñānasamuccayavādin*s), focused on meditation and/or *upāsanā* as the primary method for gaining liberation. As rival Vedānta traditions with similar doctrines, these philosophies were a greater threat to Śaṅkara than Mīmāṃsā ritualists. Śaṅkara attempts to distance himself from these traditions probably because they were so similar to him that he feared his Advaita could be conflated for them. In fact this distinction becomes of central importance within the Śaṅkara lineages in their effort to either establish or critique the *prasaṅkhyāna* contemplation. According to Śaṅkara, placing too much importance on meditation and *upāsanā* results in elevating mental action, or a combination of knowledge and mental action, to an independent means of knowledge. For Śaṅkara and his disciples, this has the disastrous consequence of leading one down a fruitless path.

options to do something, or not to do it, or to do it otherwise. When options are available in the context of Vedic ritual, then an injunction is required to direct us to the proper action.[184] In the case of injunctions there is the choice of following them or not because action occurs independently of the nature of the thing concerned. Knowledge is fundamentally different because it has no options or alternatives. Knowledge is a mental event, yet it is not done, but determined by things.[185] This makes injunctions for knowledge superfluous.[186]

As an existing entity *brahman* falls outside the scope of action. Vedic texts give knowledge about injunctions which deal with potential activity for future (*bhavya*) results alone.[187] The knowledge of the injunction by itself does not result in acquiring the desired object. The results described in such sentences are only fulfilled through performing an action or refraining from action. In contrast, sentences giving knowledge of an existing object such as *brahman* fulfill their purpose by that knowledge alone. Once knowledge takes place there is nothing left to be done. The means and the end are contained within the sentence meaning arising as cognition. In this way also there is no choice. After understanding an injunction, one chooses an action according to will. But after correctly understanding an existing object there is no choice remaining to

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184 This is particularly relevant because ritual knowledge does not fall in the domain of empirical knowledge and is dependent on the authorless Veda.

185 There is of course to some degree a voluntary element to any knowledge. One must create the proper conditions to align the means of knowledge if they are absent. For example, in visual perception the object has to be within sight, my eyes have to be open, and I may need to turn a light on. Even after the basic conditions are met I still need to intentionally direct my attention to the object. These conditions fall under the category of basic qualifications for knowledge to take place (*adhikāra*).

186 Rambachan 1991, p. 80.

187 For more on the refutation of injunctions see BUbh 5.1.1 and BSbh 1.1.4

understand it differently or as non-existent. No further action is required because knowledge is the goal. Furthermore, after one gains knowledge of *brahman* and liberation is understood as accomplished, then all notions of duality and agency are consumed in that knowledge. Action is not possible when there is nothing left to be achieved and there is no agency (*kartṛtvam*) to attach to action and the result of action. After self-knowledge there is no need for the *jñānin* to actively eschew or perform action because action is simply irrelevant at that point.

One way of explaining the distinction of *puruṣatantra* action and *vastutantra* knowledge is the idea that knowledge is dependent on a means of knowledge (*pramāṇatantra*). This distinction places the emphasis on the valid means of knowledge required for properly cognizing an object. For example, one has to use the organ of smell, the nose, for olfactory knowledge. Similarly, one must employ the Upaniṣads to know *brahman*. This emphasis negates the importance of a person's will or imagination for gaining knowledge, emphasizes the primacy of the *pramāṅa*, and implies a sense of surrendering to the *pramāṇa*. In operating a means of knowledge one should not wish it one way or another, or let notions and biases get in the way, or decide what the object will be. In fact, in Śaṅkara's conception, one's will should be suspended so it does not interfere with the epistemic process. Śaṅkara's emphasis is properly employing the Upaniṣads, the only appropriate *pramāṇa*, to reveal knowledge of *brahman*. *Nididhyāsana* is simply an extension or mode of the *pramāṇa*, which employs the Upaniṣads and allows them to reveal self-knowledge. There is no will on the part of the

contemplator, except to properly engage the *pramāṇa* through *anvaya* and *vyatireka* and to keep the mind free from distraction.

It is clear that the distinction between *upāsanā* and *nidihyāsana* is very important in Śaṅkara's mind, for he repeats the same argument at least three times in BS 1.1.4 and in numerous other places.[188] For example he writes:

> And this knowledge of identity of *brahman* and *ātman* is not in the form (of the *upāsana* called) *sampad*. For example, "The mind is indeed infinite, the *Viśvedevas* are also infinite, by this (*upāsana*) he wins an infinite world" (BU 3.1.9). Nor is self-knowledge in the form of *adhyāsa* (*upāsanā*). For example, "The mind should be meditated on as *brahman*" (CU 3.18.1). "The sun is *brahman*. This is the teaching" (CU 3.19.1). And here there is superimposition of the idea of *brahman* on to the mind, the sun, etc. Nor also is it based on some special action (of meditation) like "The air is indeed the place of merger. The *prāṇa* indeed is the place of merger (CU 4.3.1 and 4.3.3).[189]

Śaṅkara goes on to argue that *upāsanās* centered on superimposition cannot be self-knowledge because they contradict *mahāvākyas* like "You are that" (CU 6.8.7), "I am *brahman*" (BU 1.4.10), and "This self is *brahman*" (BU 2.5.19), which state the already present identity between one's self and *brahman*. Intrinsic to *upāsanās* is a stream of person-dependent thoughts linking two objects in order to superimpose them on each

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188 Also see BS 3.1.1, BS 4.1.3, BS 4.1.4, BUbh 1.4.7, 1.4.10, 2.1.4, 5.1.1, 2.3.39, GK 3.1 and GKbh 3.15. In BUbh 1.4.10 Śaṅkara specifically says that the *sampad upāsanā* can only be performed when two things are different, not when they are the same, and therefore, the self and *brahman* are not available for *upāsanā*. In BUbh 1.4.7 Śaṅkara argues that *upāsanā* cannot generate a special knowledge of the self. In BUbh 2.1.4 he writes that knowledge of the conditioned *brahman* is not knowledge and that *upāsanā* requires an original injunction. In GK 3.1 Gaudapāda says a person trying to understand non-dual *brahman* through *upāsanā* is pitiable or narrow in outlook. In GKbh 3.15 Śaṅkara says *upāsanā* is for dull people, not for people seeking liberation. KU 1.5.6 states that what people worship (through ritual or *upāsanā*) cannot objectify the self. BSbh 4.1.3 distinguishes the superimposed meditation of *upāsanā* with knowledge of non-difference. BSbh 4.1.4 states that one should not fix the idea of one's self on symbols. There cannot be *upāsanā* on the self involving self identification

189 *nacedaṃ brahmātmaikatvavijñānaṃ saṃpadrūpam | yathā anantaṃ vai mano 'nantā viśvedevā anantam eva sa tena lokaṃ jayati iti | na ca adhyāsarūpam | yathā mano brahmety upāsīta āditya*

other. In the case of *upāsanā* identifying the lower *brahman* with one's self, the identification of one's self with *brahman* is a superimposition of a concept by the mind. This superimposed *brahman* is simply a concept of *brahman* with attributes, which serves as a locus/object for imaginary superimposition.[190] Yet this conceptually objectified *brahman* cannot be non-dual *brahman*, which is not subject to objectification by definition. Such meditative superimpositions on *brahman* rely on the *upāsakā* conceiving of his or her self as infinite, expanding endlessly in time and space, embodying the universe, etc. In reality, *brahman* is not subject to time or encapsulated by any special boundaries and is thus not a thing or locus (*ālambana*) available for such meditations. The fact that *brahman* is not subject to *upāsanā* is yet another refutation of *upāsanā* as a means for self-knowledge.[191]

One point Śaṅkara emphasizes is that in the case of both *upāsanā* and *nididhāysana*, there is no true transformation or change of the individual. However in the case of *nididhyāsana*, there is a radical change of one's self-idenity. *Upāsanā* provides an imagined identity that does not transform one into the other because the two objects connected in *upāsanā* are intrinsically different and cannot result in factual identity (though one may feel as though that identity is real after cultivating experiences of unity

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brahmety ādeśaḥ iti ca mana ādityādiṣu brahmadṛṣṭyadhyāsaḥ | *nāpi viśiṣṭakriyāyoganimittaṃ vāyur vāva saṃvargaḥ prāṇo vāva saṃvargaḥ itivat* | BS 1.1.4 (my translation).

[190] In BSbh 4.1.5, Śaṅkara mentions superimposing (*adhyāropana*) the idea of *brahman* on to symbols (*pratīka*) or forms (*pratimā*) as *upāsanā* and compares it to superimposing silver onto a shell.

[191] See BSbh 1.1.4 and KU 1.5.

In BSbh 1.1.4 Śaṅkara writes, "*Brahman* is denied to be an object of the act of knowing. So also there is the denial of its being the object of the act of meditation. For in the text, 'That which is not uttered by speech, that by which speech is revealed', it is first declared that *brahman* is not an object, and then it is

in *upāsanā*). Their superimposed identity is based on resemblance, a resemblance conceived through connections and homologies provided by the Upaniṣads. Establishing the superimposed identity is dependent on the individual's imaginative power, not on the reality of the objects or a true unity of them. Furthermore, such meditations do not result in the object of meditation itself or a transformation of the lower symbol/object to the higher one. Meditating on the mind as *brahman* does not turn the mind into *brahman*. Or meditating on one's self as a certain deity, such as Indra, will not make one Indra.[192] On the other hand, when one understands "I am *brahman*" after contemplating sentences that state the unity of self and *brahman*, then that person has recognized *brahman*. There is no difference between the subject of contemplation (one's self) and the object of contemplation (*brahman*) after understanding such sentences through *nididhyāsana* because this unity is already present and factual. Self-knowledge becomes manifest in everyday awareness. Thus the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.2.9 states, "One who knows *brahman* becomes *brahman*."[193]

Śaṅkara's distinction of *puruṣatantra* and *vastutantra* is vital for the Advaitin, who may have difficulty distinguishing *nididhyāsana* from doing an *adhyāsa upāsana*

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said, 'Know that alone to be *brahman* and not what people worship as an object' (KU 1.5)" BSbh 1.1.4 (Gambhirananda 1996, p.31).

[192] One will not become Indra in this lifetime. See CU 3.14.1 for becoming the deity after death through *upāsanā*. *Upāsanā* is a means to gradual liberation (*krama-mukti*) by becoming a deity in the *brahma-loka* heaven after death. Sometimes Śaṅkara states that, "How one meditates on him (the object of *upāsanā*), him (that) indeed he becomes" (*taṁ yathā yathopāsate tad eva bhavati*). See BSbh 1.1.11, 3.4.52, 4.3.15, CUbh 1.1.7, BUbh 1.3.16 (Bader 1990, p. 35 fn. 26). This may not mean true identity. It can refer to properties, qualities, or other things that characterize the object of meditation. Or this may mean literal identity when referring to the afterlife or subsequent birth.

[193] *sa yo ha vai tatparamaṁ brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati*. Śaṅkara also quotes BU 4.2.4 and BU 4.4.25 in support of this. Of course there is no true becoming, achieving, gaining, or reaching *brahman* for it is

where one imagines one's mind or limited sense of self as *brahman*. However, even if, for the sake of argument, we hypothetically accept as true the basic tenets of Advaita, such as the validity and infallibility of the Vedas, the self-luminous nature of awareness, the identity of *ātman* and *brahman* and furthermore, the distinction of *upāsanā* and *nididhyāsana* there is still the obvious problem of just how the Advaita practitioner is to make this distinction. How does an Advaitin know whether he or she is truly doing *nididhyāsana* or accidentally practicing *upāsanā*? It seems quite likely that an Advaitin may conflate an *upāsanā* that superimposes a notion of non-duality, infinity, or all-pervasiveness, with *nididhyāsana*.

Advaitin renunciates and teachers have told me in discussions that they recognize this potential dilemma but do not find it overly problematic. In their opinion, *upāsanā* is a useful gateway to *nididhyāsana*. If the student has not clearly understood the *mahāvākya*, then he or she will naturally do *upāsanā* and is unable to do *nidihyāsana*. This will provide mental purity (*antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi*), and with continued study and clarity, the *upāsanā* will gradually transition into *nididhyāsana*. From this perspective it is not essential (and perhaps not possible) that students are capable of judging whether they are doing *upāsanā* or *nididhyāsana*. On the other hand, it seems possible that without proper understanding of this issue, students may plateau in their process, doing *upāsanā* with the mistaken assumption it is *nididhyāsana*.

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already one's self. Such terms are used metaphorically. The only thing that happens is the removal of ignorance and the mind's recognition of it's own reality.

Let me summarize the important differences between *upāsanā* and *nidhidhyāsana*. The fundamental distinction is that *upāsanā*, unlike *nididhyāsana*, has no self-knowledge content. It is an action, and therefore subject to all the objections concerning action in the context of liberation. It creates time-bound results in the future (*bhavya phala*), does not deal with present objects such as one's self (or perceptual objects), is dependent on human will, requires injunctions, and cannot remove self-ignorance and superimposition. *Upāsanā*, even when using one's mind or limited self-conception as an object for superimposition, only deals with a qualified (*saguṇa*), conceptual, and objectifiable *ātman*/*brahman*, and remains at the empirical level of reality (*vyāvahārika avasthā*).[194] For the Advaitin, *upāsanā* is primarily to be aimed at purification of mind and mental steadiness.

Nididhyāsana is for recognizing an existing reality (*bhūta vastu*), *brahman*. It makes use of a valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) and depends on an immediate object, and therefore does not have any direct positive results that are subject to time, and is not subject to the drawbacks of action. It is centered on *brahman* without attributes (*nirguṇa*), which is absolute undifferentiated awareness at the highest level of reality (*pāramārthika avasthā*) and identified as one's self-luminous, non-conceptual,

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[194] BS 3.1.1
In GK 3.1 Gaudapāda says a person trying to understand non-dual *brahman* through *upāsanā* is pitiable or narrow in outlook.
In BUbh 1.4.7 Śaṅkara argues that *upāsanā* cannot generate a special knowledge of the self.
BUbh 2.1.4 says that knowledge of the conditioned *brahman* is not knowledge and that *upāsanā* requires an original injunction.
KU 1.5.6 states that what people worship (through ritual or *upāsanā*) cannot objectify the self.
BS 4.1.4 states that one should not fix the idea of one's self on symbols. There cannot be *upāsanā* on the self involving self-identification.

unobjectifiable *ātman*. *Nididhyāsana* is a process necessary for clarifying the meaning of the Upaniṣads and removing obstacles to knowledge.

Furthermore, even though the verbal roots *upa+ās*, *vid*, and *jñā* are used interchangeably in the Upaniṣads and by Śaṅkara and others, Advaitins use radically different language techniques depending on the contextual objective. On the surface, sentences dealing with *upāsanā* and *nididhyāsana* look similar because both state some type of equation and both are intimately connected to the language found in the Upaniṣads. The difference lies in how Śaṅkara interprets or resolves such equations. The power of the Upaniṣadic word/sentence taken as the basis for *upāsanā* or *nididhyāsana* appears to be quite different in each case. Some *upāsanā*s depend on a mystical power intrinsic to the word itself, particularly those based on etymological equivalences. So too, is the power of the sentence, in terms of its meaning, the basis for *nididhyāsana*. Śaṅkara's approach to *nididhyāsana* may at some levels retain this mystical power of the word (at least in terms of claiming the authorless infallible nature of the Vedas and their status as a *pramāṇa*) but this recedes to the background in *nididhyāsana*. The power of the *mahāvākya* sentence is located in the method of understanding the sentence, not a mystical power of the words.

Passages dealing with *upāsanā* (as meditative action) use positive language of names and forms to create a first-person identification.[195] On the other hand, passages dealing with *nididhyāsana* employ continuity and discontinuity to isolate the self by negating all erroneously superimposed self-identities, and state an equation to indicate the

self's identity as unobjectifiable *brahman*. Corresponding to these forms of language, we find that *upāsanā* builds one's identity up, or negates one's identity in order to establish a greater one. *Upāsanā* uses imagined superimposition to create an experience and conviction of identity, a temporary identification with something else. There is still a knower and known, even though one's identity as the knower may change according to the superimposed variables enjoined in the *upāsanā*. The *ahaṅkāra* (ego or I-sense) is not negated in *upāsana* in the way it is through knowledge, though the *ahaṅkāra* may be affected. One could say that the aggrandizement of the *ahaṅkāra* in *upāsanā* (by visualizing it as the sun, or as infinite, or as *brahman*, etc.) is in fact a way of negating one's limited notion of self in favor of a different identity; however, one's sense of self is still only expanding to a larger sense of self which is still limited conceptually and within the boundaries of finite space and time. This is fundamentally different than the self's negation and identity as *brahman* through self-knowledge. Though *upāsanā* is a helpful step towards self-knowledge because by changing self-identities one may become more comfortable negating self-identities through self-knowledge.

Nididhyāsana negates one's everyday identity so that only *brahman* is left. *Nididhyāsana* cuts through dualities and directly allows non-duality and the identity of *ātman* with *brahman* as a self-evident fact. All differences of knower, known, and knowledge are resolved through this self-knowledge. When the mind recognizes that it is illumined by *brahman* and not separate from *brahman*, then there is no finite self to

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[195] BU 4.3.14 and BU 4.3.9.

superimpose upon something else and no locus for attachment. Then the I-notion loses its sense of finite identity and naturally dissolves.

2.4: Śaṅkara and the *prasaṅkhyāna* Contemplation

One of the most important discussions in early Advaita literature regarding the difference between action and contemplation is the question of *prasaṅkhyāna*, a practice of repeated contemplation that is closely related yet fundamentally different from Sankara's *nididhyāsana*. During Śaṅkara's time different Advaitins had slightly different interpretations of *prasaṅkhyāna*, and their distinctions are not always clear. The writing of most of these *ācārya*s is lost, with only fragments or references of them surviving in other texts. However, from the brief references available, it appears that *prasaṅkhyānavādins*, those who hold the *prasaṅkhyāna* position, believe that words are insufficient for giving a direct experience of *brahman*. Instead, one must transcend verbal knowledge in order to gain a direct experience. This doctrine led to disputes among Vedāntins. The fundamental question underlying this dispute is how a student moves from studying the Upaniṣad texts to liberation. Are the texts alone sufficient, and if so how? For we find many people who study texts but they appear to lack direct knowledge and wisdom. Or is some type of other mental action, such as meditation or repetition, necessary for producing direct knowledge? In this case we face another problem: how is an action capable of producing knowledge?

Śaṅkara and his immediate disciple, Sureśvara, offer severe criticisms of *prasaṅkhyāna*, evidence that they regarded it as a dangerous doctrine. Śaṅkara and Sureśvara believe that *prasaṅkhyāna* is a form of action, is independent of the Upaniṣads,

and compromises the authority of the Upaniṣads. Intrinsic to their descriptions of *prasaṅkhyāna* is that listening to the teacher unfold the Upaniṣads and studying the texts can only result in mediate knowledge, not liberation; that indirect verbal knowledge must be transformed into immediate knowledge through repeated contemplative action; and that *prasaṅkhyāna* is an action apart from the Upaniṣads or some combination of action and textual knowledge, which requires Mīmāṁsā style injunctions. For Śaṅkara, the *prasaṅkhyānavādin*, intentionally or unwittingly makes the erroneous move of elevating the status of contemplation to that of an independent source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). This compromises the authority of the Upaniṣads by making them dependent on and secondary to contemplation.

The *prasaṅkhyāna* position, which I will explain in the following sections, is further complicated because early Advaitins struggled to distinguish *nididhyāsana* from *prasaṅkhyāna*. Some criticized it and accused other Advaitins of being *prasaṅkhyānavādin*s, yet did not clearly differentiate their own position. Others agreed with *prasaṅkhyāna* to some degree (even though they may not identity themselves as *prasaṅkhyānavādin*s) but certainly did not think their position contradicted Advaita theory. Foremost among the latter are Maṇḍana Miśra and Vācaspati Miśra, who were both well-known Advaitins. Maṇḍana Miśra was an older contemporary of Śaṅkara and the author of the *Brahmasiddhi*, a text that was highly influential for many centuries. The later Advaita tradition tended to identify Maṇḍana with Sureśvara. However, many

scholars have contested this identification and most agree that they are not identical.[196] Maṇḍana is the author of other authoritative works, particularly on Mīmāṁsā, such as the *Mīmāṁsānukramaṇika*, the *Bhāvanāviveka* and the *Vidhiviveka*. He also wrote the *Sphoṭasiddhi*, a work analyzing the grammarians' philosophy of language, as well as the *Vibhramaviveka*, which looks at theories of error.[197] Like Maṇḍana, Vācaspati Miśra was a polymath, who lived during the 10th century C.E. His works ranged throughout Indian philosophy and included Advaita Vedānta, Nyāya, Mīmāṁsā, Sāṅkhya, and Patañjali Yoga.[198] Within Advaita he is best known for his *Bhāmatī,* the first full length commentary on Śaṅkara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣyam.* Maṇḍana's and Vācaspati's interpretations regarding the nature of contemplative practice contributed to the polarization of later Advaita writing, and are one of the many issues that led to the opposition between the later *Bhāmatī* and *Vivaraṇa* schools of Advaita.

From a bird's eye view we have two broadly differing positions within the literature: (1) Śaṅkara, his disciples, and the Vivaraṇa deemphasize *nididhyāsana*. They completely exclude any action from the domain of knowledge and emphasize the importance and authority of the Upaniṣads for generating direct knowledge. This is for many possible reasons, mostly to uphold testimony in the form of the Upaniṣads, as the ultimate and only source of knowing one's self-identity with *brahman*. A second important issue is to avoid contradicting the doctrine of the self-luminosity of *brahman*.

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196 See Kuppuswami Sastri's (1937) introduction to the *Brahmasiddhi*. Others, such as R. Balasubramanian 1983, 2000, argue that there is not enough evidence to make the clame that Maṇḍana and Sureśvara are not the same person.

197 Balasubramanian 2000, p. 175.

To some degree Śaṅkara marginalizes *nididhyāsana* by reducing it to a mode of listening to the Upaniṣads, so much so, that his references to *nididhyāsana* are fleeting and far between. Sureśvara follows suit and occasionally takes an extreme position, completely negating *nididhyāsana* and emphasizing solely listening (*śravaṇa*) and logical reflection (*manana*). A similar rejection of *nididhyāsana* may also be implicitly read in some of Śaṅkara's writing though he does not directly say so.

(2) The second position, found in Maṇḍana, Vācaspati, and the Bhāmatī school, views *nididhyāsana* much more positively. Maṇḍana is a bit apologetic for action and meditation. He struggles to reconcile the necessity for direct experience of *brahman* with the experientially indirect, theoretical, and verbal nature of Upaniṣad texts. He thus emphasizes the necessity of repeatedly contemplating the Upaniṣad sentences. This is a special form of contemplative practice, commonly labeled as *prasaṅkhyāna*, which transforms indirect (*parokṣa*) knowledge from the Upaniṣads into direct immediate (*aparokṣa*) knowledge. The position's emphasis on *nididhyāsana* /*prasaṅkhyāna* may create some questionable epistemological situations, as we shall see, yet its attempt to find more value in *nididhyāsana* speaks to the realities of Advaita students who fail to gain knowledge simply by listening, or who are stuck in a purely academic type of knowledge and fail to see themselves as immediately non-dual.

I believe these two opposed positions reveal the difficulty Advaitins, in particular Śaṅkara, had in reconciling the tension between epistemology and practice. Śaṅkara, in his *Upadeśasāhasrī*, critiques a proto-*prasaṅkhyāna* position similar to that of Maṇḍana's

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[198] Sankaranarayanan 2000, p. 286.

in his *Brahmasiddhi*. Sureśvara directly and severely critiques Maṇḍana repeatedly throughout his major works. And in later centuries Prakāśātman, who wrote on Padmapāda's work in his *Pañcapādikavivaraṇa* (which became the moniker for the Vivaraṇa school) criticized Vācaspati Miśra's *Bhāmatī* (which became the moniker for the Bhāmatī school) for being a *prasaṅkhyānavādin* (though it is questionable if these critiques are accurate or if they are creating straw men).

In the following sections I explore Maṇḍanamiśra's understanding of *prasaṅkhyāna* in his work, the *Brahmasiddhi*, and Śaṅkara's refutation of *prasaṅkhyāna* in his *Upadeśasāhasrī*. Do Śaṅkara and Maṇḍana use the term *prasaṅkhyāna* in the same way? Does Śaṅkara's critique accurately dismantle Maṇḍana's theory? Can Maṇḍana legitimately defend his arguments for *prasaṅkhyāna* against Śaṅkara's critique? Crucial doctrines are at stake in this discussion. The answers to these questions not only illumine critical theoretical and methodological differences among early Advaitins, but also penetrate Advaita's essential, yet sometimes ambiguous understanding of verbal knowledge, immediate knowledge, and contemplative practice. At the same time the ambiguities and dilemmas that surface in this discussion reflect their struggle to resolve the tension between epistemology and practice in the tradition.

2.4.1: Maṇḍana's Understanding of *prasaṅkhyāna*

The term *prasaṅkhyāna* has the meanings or enumeration or repeated meditation. Perhaps the earliest philosophical use of *prasaṅkhyāna* occurs in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*,

where it is attested only once in YS 4.29.[199] It also occurs in Vyāsa's commentary on this *sūtra* and on four other *sūtras*.[200] The Yogic *prasaṅkhyāna* is a specific practice that destroys afflictive psychological dispositions (*kleśas*)[201] and develops detachment (*vairāgya*) through discriminative insight (*viveka khyāti*). It is an important factor leading to *dharmameghasamādhi*, the penultimate stage of the Yogi's highest state of *samādhi*.[202]

In the entire *Brahmasiddhi*, Maṇḍana uses the word '*prasaṅkhyāna*' only twice and in the same passage.[203] Maṇḍana brings up *prasaṅkhyāna* in the context of refuting different theories of the relationship between knowledge (*jñāna*) and action (*karman*). The second theory Maṇḍana raises is that action is a means to destroy desire, and only by destroying desire though action will one gain the highest state of Prajāpati.[204] Maṇḍana explains that this position is incorrect "because the destruction of desires is not through the fulfillment of desires, but through *prasaṅkhyāna*, which has the ground of the repetition of defects."[205] The Vedas contain various means to desirable objects. A

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[199] *prasaṅkhyāne 'py akusīdasya sarvathā vivekakhyāter dharmameghaḥ samādhiḥ* (YS 4.29).

[200] See YSBh 1.2; 1.15; 2.2; 2.11

[201] See Bader 1990, pp.76, 82 and Rukmani 2007, pp. 131-139 for more details about *prasaṅkhyāna* and Yoga.

[202] The use of *prasaṅkhyāna* may differ between the different *sūtra*s and there are varying interpretations of its definition. It can also be identified with *dharmameghasamādhi*. In 4.29 there is a reference to letting go of attachment to the accomplisment (*siddhi*) of *sarvabhāva* (omniscience or pervasive presence). *Vivekakhyāti* may not simply be detachment from desires, or accomplishments, but the discrimination of the intellect (*buddhi*) from pure awareness (*puruṣa*). See Sundaresan 1998, pp. 65-71, and Rukmani 2007, pp. 131-9 for more details. Also see Dasgupta 1997, vol II pp. 250-51, who says *prasaṇkhyāna* is rooting out *saṁskāra*s and that true knowledge takes place through *dharmameghasamādhi*.

[203] BrSi, p. 30.

[204] BrSi, pp. 27, 13-16.

[205] BrSi, p. 30. *yato na kāmaprāptyā kāmapravilayaḥ, api tu doṣaparibhāvanābhuvā prasaṅkhyānena* (my translation).

person will never be fulfilled by these pleasurable objects and will continue pursuing them and naturally become averse to pursing self-knowledge. The only means to destroy desire is by *prasaṅkhyāna,* the repeated meditation or analysis of the negative aspects and faults of desire.[206]

It is interesting to note that Maṇḍana does not necessarily use the term *prasaṅkhyāna* for repetition of self-knowledge or as a synonym for Advaita's contemplation (*nididhyāsana)*, but as a specific practice for neutralizing desires by focusing on their negative repercussions.[207] His use of *prasaṅkhyāna* is closer to its use in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, particularly YS 1.15. where Vyāsa, the commentator, mentions the technique of seeing the defects of desirable objects when in their presence. In fact, Maṇḍana even quotes Vyāsa's commentary on YS 2.15 to lend more authority to his advocacy of the effectiveness of *prasaṅkhyāna*.[208] Ma ṇḍana is not employing *prasaṅkhyāna* as a means to convert indirect self-knowledge into direct self-knowledge.[209] It is a form of meditation used to let go of desires by understanding how

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The translation of "ground" (*bhuvā*) is problematic here. It could be translated as "*prasaṅkhyāna* which has the ground of repetition of defects" if '*bhuvā*' is taken as a noun. If '*bhuvā*' is understood as a verb, making an *upapadatatpuruṣa* compound, the sentence will be translated as '*prasaṅkhyāna*, which arises by the repetition of *doṣas*".

206 *tasmāt prasaṅkhyānam evaikaḥ kāmanibarhaṇopāyaḥ* (BrSi, p. 30)

207 In a separate instance he uses the phrase *prasankyātāni karmāṇi* (BrSi p. 33 line 11), but this is in an unrelated context, which takes the literal meaning of enumerated actions.

208 *bhogābhyāsamanu vivardhanti rāgāḥ kauśalāni cendriyāṇām iti* (YSBh 2.15). Repetition of enjoyment increases desires and sharpens the sense organs.

209 Maṇḍana does not make this entirely clear. There are some parallels between his *prasaṅkhyāna* and contemplative practice that make this distinction a bit ambiguous. It is also important to note that the context of the root sentence for *nididhyāsana* in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.5 (*ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyaḥ mantavyaḥ nididhyāsitavyaḥ*) is dealing with letting go of attachments to wife, husbands, sons, wealth, etc. (see chapter 4). While the result of *vairāgya* occurs both in the Advaitin's and Patañjali Yogin's process, the methods are fundamentally different. The Advaitin does not actively examine *doṣas*, but understands the *ātman* through knowledge.

they are problematic in their consequences even when fulfilled and how they obstruct one's path to liberation. This is a common practice for cultivating detachment (*vairāgya*) in Advaita and the larger context of Indian philosophies. It is not unique to Maṇḍana.[210]

During or prior to Śaṅkara's time period, other Vedānta traditions apparently redefined *prasaṅkhyāna* as different variations of contemplative practice which involve both knowledge and action. Identifying Maṇḍana as a *prasaṅkhyānavādin* probably occurred following Śaṅkara refutation of the *prasaṅkhyāna* position in the US. His disciple Sureśvara also uses the term and specifically targets Maṇḍana and other philosophers, such as Brahmadatta,[211] as holding this view of *prasaṅkhyāna*.[212] However, I believe it may be a historical misnomer to term Maṇḍana's contemplation *prasaṅkhyāna* because he employs *prasaṅkhyāna* to neutralize desires, and uses other

[210] For example, see Vatsyayana's *Nyāyabhāṣa* 4.2.46. For a similar practice see GK 3.43 and Śaṅkara's commentary on it.

[211] See Jacob's introduction to his edition of the *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi*, p. xxiii. He cites the *Vidyāsurabhi* commentary on *Naiṛkarmyasiddhi* 1.67 and Ānandajñāna's commentary on Sureśvara's *Sambandhavārtika*, verse 797, where Brahmadatta is named. See also M. Hiriyanna, "Brahmadatta: An Old Vedāntin," Proceedings of the All-India Oriental Conference 4 (1925), pp. 78-98 and Potter 1970, p. 354 (from Thrasher 1979, p. 133 fn. 43).

[212] Sureśvara built on Śaṅkara's arguments in his *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi, Taittirīya Vārtikas,* and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Vārtikas*.

The *prasaṅkhyānavāda* would also become identified with Vācaspati Miśra's conception of contemplative practice. Vācaspati Miśra integrated many of Maṇḍana's ideas into Śāṅkara Advaita through his work, the *Bhāmatī*, an important full-length *ṭīkā* on *Śāṅkarabhāṣyam*. In addition, Vācaspati wrote an important commentary on Vyāsa's YSBh, the *Tattvavaiśāradi ṭīkā*, and was clearly aware of Yoga's use of *prasaṇkhyāna*. In fact in his *ṭīkā* on YSBh 1.15 he explains *prasaṅkhyāna* almost identically to Maṇḍana's use of it. I have not been able to find any reference to *prasaṅkhyāna* in the *Bhāmatī* and it is unlikely that Vacaspati used that term to denote his contemplative practice. Vācaspati also wrote a commentary on the *Brahmasiddhi* named the *Tattvasamīkṣā*. The *Tattvasamīkṣā* was thought lost, but recently scholars discovered a fragmentary manuscript. This manuscript is reconstructed and published by Diwakar Acharya 2006. Unfortunately we do not know how Vācaspati glosses Maṇḍana's use of *prasaṇkhyāna* in this commentary because the relevant folios are missing. However, Vācaspati does support the indirect and temporary nature of verbal knowledge and the necessity of repeated contemplation for direct knowledge in the *Tattvasamīkṣā* (Acharya 2006, pp. 260-1). It is possible that the opponents of the Bhāmatī tradition labeled Vācaspati as a *prasaṅkhyānavādin* due to his integration of Maṇḍana, and as a polemical device for

terms to denote contemplation. This terminological confusion may also be influenced by Patañjali's and Maṇḍana's mutual use of the word *saṃskāra*. The Yoga use of *saṃskāra* revolves around *kleśas* and problematic desires. As I will show below, Maṇḍana's contemplative practice does not focus on simple desires or *kleśas*, but on specific *saṃskāras* that obstruct or disrupt knowledge of non-duality.[213] Despite this problem of terminology, in this study I will continue to use the term *prasaṅkhyāna* to mean contemplation with Maṇḍana because this reading is commonly accepted by scholars. This is in accord with Saṅkara and later Advaita *ācaryas*, who interpret *prasaṅkhyāna* in the manner of Maṇḍana as repeated contemplation on Upaniṣad sentences, rather than the Yogic process of examining *doṣas*.

Maṇḍana uses a number of different words and phrases for contemplation. These include *tattvadarśanābhyāsa* (the repetition of the vision of reality),[214] *pramāṇa anusandhāna* (examination of the means of knowledge),[215] *anucintanam* (recollecting or calling to mind),[216] *upāsanā*.[217] and *dhyānābhyāsa* (repeated contemplation).[218] To take just one example, Maṇḍana describes *dhyānābhyāsa* as the following:

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identifying him with Śaṇkara's opponents; however, I do not know if this first originates in the Vivaraṇa texts.

213 This distinction is a little difficult because Yoga has a range of types of *saṃskāra*, mental dispositions with information. Some are are the last obstacles to gaining final *asamprajñāta samādhi*, a type of *saṁskāra* that may be closer to Maṇḍana's conception. It is possible that Maṇḍana was heavily influenced by Yoga's theory of *saṃskāra,* particularly the idea of negating old *saṃskāra*s and instilling new ones.

214 BrSi, pp. 12-13.

215 BrSi, p. 35.

216 BrSi, p. 154.

217 BrSi, p. 134. In the same passage he also uses '*bhāvanā*' and '*dhyānam*' as synonyms for *upāsanā*. Also see BrSi pp. 12-13.

218 BrSi, p. 12.

> How is ignorance removed? By the different means spoken by the *śāstra*, listening, reflection, and repeated contemplation[219] and by celibacy etc. How? This repeated contemplation, preceded by listening and reflection (in the form of) "This (self) is not that, not that," is on the self, which is contradictory to the entire world of duality. That (contemplation) is clearly contradictory to the vision of duality and removes it. And (this contemplation) removing the vision of duality in general also becomes dissolved by itself.[220]

We find two major aspects of Maṇḍana contemplation from the above quote and the various terms he employs. It is completely dependent on verbal knowledge produced from the Upaniṣads and it consists of repetition. One must repeatedly revisit the *mahāvākyas.* Repetition is focused on the meaning of words, and is not simple meditation or mechanical repetition as in *mantra japa*. In his view, contemplation appears to be something deeper than basic semantic and syntactic analysis and it is supposed to strengthen one's sense of being *brahman*. At the same time, even though he uses the term *upāsanā*, it is not a form of visualization or mental worship.[221]

A number of interrelated factors lead Maṇḍana to emphasize the necessity of repeated contemplation. (1) In Maṇḍana's view, language can only generate mediate, indirect (*parokṣa*) propositional self-knowledge. If language is intrinsically limited to conferring indirect knowledge of *brahman*, then something additional is required to transform that indirect knowledge into direct and immediately experienced knowledge.

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[219] I translate *dhyāna* as contemplation here because it is clearly a reference to *nididhyāsana* and follows from listening. It is not the same as more general forms of yogic concentration.

[220] *Kena punar upāyenāvidyā nivartate? śravaṇamananadhyānābhyāsair brahmacaryādibhiś ca sādhanabhedaiḥ śāstroktaiḥ | katham? yo 'yam śravaṇamananapūrvako dhyānābhyāsaḥ pratiṣidhākhilabhedaprapañce "sa eṣa neti neti" ātmani, sa vyaktam eva bhedadarśanapratiyogī tan nivartayati; sa ca sāmānyena bhedadarśanaṁ pravilāpayann ātmanāpi pravilīyate |* (my translation).

[221] It is interesting to note that Maṇḍana rarely, if at all, uses *nididhāasana*, the common term for contemplation in Advaita, even when directly citing the root sentence for *nididhyāsana* which is in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.5. For example, see BrSi, p. 12, 35.

(2) Even though the Upaniṣads convey knowledge of *brahman*, this knowledge does not completely root out ignorance. Ignorance continues even after verbal knowledge. The Advaitin requires *prasaṅkhyāna* as an additional means to destroy this remaining ignorance. (3) The mental impressions (*saṃskāra*s) from perception and worldly activity continue to obstruct knowledge. A stronger *samskāra* of direct knowledge of *brahman* (*aparokṣa brahmajñāna*), strengthened and reinforced through *prasaṅkhyāna,* is necessary to suppress and cancel out worldly *samskāras*. (4) The direct perception of the world is more powerful than the indirect knowledge from the Upaniṣads. The Advaitin requires a direct experience of *brahman* which is able to negate direct perceptual experience.

Maṇḍana is adamant that the Upaniṣads are the proper means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) for self-knowledge.[222] They give real knowledge of *brahman* which is certain and free of doubt. He supplies copious arguments to demonstrate their validity and to affirm that they are free from defects and not of human authorship. He also tries to prove that the knowledge conveyed by the Upaniṣads trumps that of perception.[223] Despite his defense of the Upaniṣads, he claims that all verbal knowledge is indirect or mediate (*parokṣa*)[224] and of a complex nature (*samsṛṣṭa*).[225] All verbal knowledge involves relation of some manner. In a sentence there are different words referring to different objects. It is syntactically proper arrangement of words that makes a sentence. Thus, the

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[222] BrSi, pp. 156-7.
[223] BrSi, pp. 39-44. For further explanation see Thrasher 1978, pp. 156-7 and Balasubramanian 1983, pp. 140-50.
[224] *parokṣarūpaṃ śābdajñānam* (BrSi, p. 134).

sentence can only generate a complex cognition that involves divisions, and cannot generate a cognition of non-duality capable of eliminating ignorance. Though the Upaniṣads convey knowledge of *brahman* that is free from doubt, they cannot give immediate knowledge, and ignorance continues in the absence of immediate knowledge.[226]

Maṇḍana provides us with a significant discussion of the potential of *śabda pramāṇa* in his analysis of the concepts of *karman* and *jñāna*. He refutes a number of different views, including the view that *karman* and knowledge are unconnected and fundamentally opposed. This view is strikingly similar to Śaṅkara's position and possibly represents his lineage.[227] In the ensuing discussion, an opponent to this view argues that verbal knowledge cannot, by itself, provide non-dual knowledge of *brahman*. It is unclear here whether this opponent is Maṇḍana's own voice, though this appears unlikely.[228] However, Ma ṇḍana clearly does not agree with the opposing *pūrvapakṣa*

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[225] BrSi, p. 19. See Thrasher 1978, pp. 150-1 and 1993, p. 93.
[226] BrSi, p. 134.
[227] This of course raises the question whether Maṇḍana knew Śaṅkara. This is possible, however Śaṅkara's views may have represented a broader group of Advaitins at that time and not his own idiosyncratic ideas. In any case, I don't believe Maṇḍana's views are derivative of Śaṅkara.
[228] BrSi, p. 33. This may be a *siddhantaikadeśin* who does not fully represent Maṇḍana's views. Thrasher notes that the commentator Ānandapūrṇa takes the opponent to the *pūrvapakṣa* as the *siddhāntin*, while the commentator Citsukha takes him as a *siddhāntaikadeśin*. Thrasher points out that after this discussion, in Maṇḍana's statement of his own position, he does not explicitly claim that verbal knowledge necessarily involves division and does not use the same terminology as the objector to Śaṅkara's position (Thrasher 1978, p. 153).

According to Thrasher 1978, p. 153, we cannot claim that Maṇḍana does not accept verbal knowledge without divisions (*nirvikalpa*). Thrasher appears to argue, based on Maṇḍana's theory of language and his *śabda brahman* theory, that the final cognition can still be verbal and direct. Even though Maṇḍana comes to this from a different angle, it may take him closer to Śaṅkara and contradict some of Śaṅkara and Sureśvara's rejections of *prasaṅkhyāna*. It also keeps Maṇḍana more tied to the Upaniṣads throughout the process than I normally think of him, even if he is not explicitly using verbal methods such as implication *(lakṣaṇā*).

view resembling Śaṅkara, that language is alone capable of generating direct liberating knowledge. It is the inefficacy of language that necessitates *prasaṅkhyāna*.

Maṇḍana claims that mental impressions (*saṃskāra*s) block a student from gaining immediate knowledge. Maṇḍana's theory of *saṃskāra* is intimately connected with the mediate nature of verbal knowledge and underlies the necessity for *prasaṅkhyāna*. He says,

> Even when the reality is determined firmly from a means of knowledge, false appearances do not stop. They continue to exist because of particular causes. For example, the error of seeing two moons or the error of direction continues for a person who has gained the truth of the (single) moon or the (proper) direction from a trustworthy person. In a similar way, even for a person who has understood the true nature of *ātman* from the Vedas without any doubts, there is still a continuation of false appearances because of the strength of strong mental impressions (*samskāra*) accumulated by the repetition of beginningless false vision. Something else is required for its removal, and that is well known in the world as the repetition of the understanding of reality.[229]

In this passage Maṇḍana points out that firm knowledge from a proper source is not capable of overpowering deep-rooted *saṃskāra*s. *Saṃskāra*s are so powerful that they continue causing confusion and even create completely illusory emotions and sense perceptions. Repetition of one's verbal understanding of reality (*tattvadarśanābhyāsa*) is the necessary additional practice that removes *saṃskāra*s. Maṇḍana clarifies how this repetition functions:

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[229] *niścite 'pi pramānāt tattve na sarvatra mithyāvabhāsā nivartante, hetuviśeṣād anuvartante 'pi; yathā dvicandradigviparyāsādayaḥ āptavacanaviniścitadikcandratatvānām; tathā nirvicikitsād āmnāyād avagatātmatattvasya anādimithyādarśanābhyāsopacitabalavatsaṃskārasāmarthyān mithyāvabhāsānuvṛttiḥ; tan nivṛtaye 'asty anyad apekṝyam; tac ca tattvadarśanābhyāso lokasiddhiḥ* | BrSi, p. 35 (my translation).

> Strengthening (its own) *saṃskāra*, and having blocked the earlier *saṃskāra*, repetition accomplishes its own purpose (effect)….Even when the vision of reality (verbal knowledge) takes place, when an effective *saṃskāra* is not instilled, and when a *saṃskāra* born of the vision of falsity is stronger, even certitude becomes a false object. For example, a person confused about a direction, who does not instill the knowledge imparted to him from a qualified person (becomes confused again) because he is seen to continue as before (in the wrong direction). So too, even when the nature (of the snake) as rope is understood, fear is seen (in him) when the means of knowledge is not examined. Therefore, even when the vision of reality has arisen from a means of knowledge, they consider that the repetition of the vision of reality eradicates and suppresses the earlier stronger *saṃskāra*, which is the result of the repetition of beginningless false vision. So too, it is said, "it is to be reflected on, it is to be contemplated.[230]

Maṇḍana affirms the proposition that the Upaniṣads not only give knowledge of *brahman* but do so with absolute intellectual certainty. In a later passage in the same discussion he again states that knowledge is produced from words and that the Upaniṣads result in certainty because they are free from all doubt.[231] These passages show a particular aspect of Maṇḍana's understanding of language and contemplation. Even though the Upaniṣads may only give indirect knowledge, they can still remove all doubts and lead to *niścaya* (firmness or certainty); however, this *niścaya* is not the final liberating knowledge. Maṇḍana's *niścaya* is perhaps a form of intellectual certainty where one is convinced of a particular position, in this case non-duality. If a person accepts the validity of the Upaniṣads, the authority of the teacher, and has doubts removed through logical arguments he or she will be convinced. This intellectual

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[230] *abhyāso hi saṃskāraṃ draḍhayan pūrvasaṃskāraṃ pratibadhya svakāryaṃ saṃtanoti…. jāte 'pi tattvadarśane, anāhite ca paṭau saṃskāre, draḍhīyasi ca mithyādarśanaje saṃskāre niścayā api mithyārthā bhavanti; yathā diṅmūḍhasyānanusaṃhitāptavacasaḥ, prag iva pravṛttidarśanāt; tathā pramitarajjubhāvāyā api rajjvāḥ pramānānanusandhāne sarpabhrāntyā bhayadarśanam| tasmāj jāte 'pi pramānāt tattvadarśane anādimithyādarśanābhyāsapariniṣpannasya draḍhīyasaḥ saṃskārasyābhibhavāyocchedāya vā tatvadarśanābhyāsaṃ manyante | tathā ca mantavyo nididhyāsitavyaḥ ity ucyate |* BrSi, p. 35 (my translation).

conviction may appear firm, but in reality is weak and shallow in the face of contradictory life experiences.

The goal of *prasaṅkhyāna* is not *niścaya*, for that would make it redundant to verbal knowledge which has already accomplished *niścaya*. Maṇḍana explains that repeated contemplation of the verbal knowledge of *brahman* has a two-fold effect. It strengthens the *saṃskāra* born from verbal knowledge and suppresses and eradicates contradictory *saṃskāras* of duality. According to this theory, a *pramāṇa*, in this case the Upaniṣads, produces a weak *saṃskāra*. This *saṃskāra* lacks strength because it is new and contradicted by other *saṃskāra*s. In the context of self-knowledge, there are innumerable *samskāra*s from previous lifetimes negating the possibility of non-duality and reinforcing the reality of the world and duality. Verbal *brahmajñāna* has no chance against such an overwhelming force, and error will continue to remain despite any *niścaya*. The solution is to repeatedly contemplate one's view of non-dual reality.

In response to the explanation of *samskāra*s, an objector retorts that if the *pramāṇa* produces certitude, then there should not be any activity for that person.[232] At this point it should also make no difference if false appearances continue to exist. Maṇḍana gives two additional illustrations to solve this doubt. When a spectator is watching a play, he knows certainly that the play is not real. But despite this knowledge, the actors on stage are the causes of his sadness and fear, emotions that are false appearances. Or a person may clearly know the sweetness of sugar, but due to a certain

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[231] BrSi, p. 35.
[232] BrSi, p. 35.

illness such as jaundice, the sugar has the false taste of bitterness. Even though one logically knows that the experience of bitterness is only a false appearance, it is disturbing and forces the individual to spit out the sugar.[233]

In a later section of the *Brahmasiddhi*, Maṇḍana continues to develop his argument for *prasaṅkhyāna*. He writes,

> Verbal knowledge has an indirect form and the appearance of the world has a direct form. Because of this, there is no mutual contradiction between the two. The appearance of the world is not a non-toucher of the self, is not a non producer of any effect, is not non bondage.[234]

Here Maṇḍana claims that indirect verbal knowledge remains distant from the individual. The phenomenal world on the other hand is immediately and directly experienced and is a constant barrage of stimuli to all our sense organs. Verbal knowledge and perception are in effect different species and do not oppose each other.[235] The directly experienced world has a stronger effect than verbal knowledge. Maṇḍana illustrates this with another version of the sugar illustration, similar to the one in his discussion of *saṃskāra*s. In the process of converting sugar cane into sugar (*jaggery*) there are a number of intermediate stages of the sugar substance that are occasionally consumed. In one of these intermediary stages the sugar tastes bitter, even though one knows this is a false appearance. Other *pramāṇas*, such as being told it is sugar, prior experience, and inference, demonstrate that the sugar is not intrinsically bitter. The taste of bitterness has

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[233] BrSi, p. 35.
[234] *ucyate parokṣarūpaṃ śābdajñānam, pratyakṣarūpaḥ prapañcāvabhāsaḥ; tena tayor avirodhena prapañcāvabhāso nātmāsaṃsparśī, nākiṃcitkaraḥ, na na bandhaḥ* | BrSi, p. 134 (my translation).
[235] Śaṅkhāpāni's commentary provides details (BrSi, pp. 265-6).

a similar form to perception but does not actually relate to the substance. Despite knowing this fact, the appearance of perception is more powerful, and due to dislike one will spit it out.[236]

Verbal knowledge of non-duality contradicts the reality of the world, but this contradiction has little effect for the practitioner because in Maṇḍana's opinion, verbal knowledge cannot counter direct experience. The solution is strengthening verbal knowledge into direct experience (*sākṣātkāra*) through *prasaṅkhyāna*.[237] At this point knowledge becomes *aparokṣa* and exists for the individual at the same level as direct perception. When *aparokṣa* knowledge and the phenomenal world are thus mutually contradictory, self-knowledge can negate the appearance of the world. Then the individual becomes liberated, is not affected by the world, and there is no occasion for error to arise again.

2.4.2: Śaṅkara's Critique of *prasaṅkhyāna* in the Upadeśasāhasrī

Śaṅkara provides an extended critique of the *prasaṅkhyānavāda* in metrical chapter eighteen of his *Upadeśasāhasrī*.[238] He summarizes the *prasaṅkhyāna* position in verses 18.9-18.[239] The following are the major aspects he points out: (1) *Prasaṅkhyāna*, which consists of repetition (*anucintanam*) and reasoning (*yukti*) is necessary because

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[236] See BrSi, p. 134 and Śaṅkhapāṇi's commentary on this in BrSi, pp. 265-6. Śaṇkapāṇi identifies this intermediate substance as *khaṇḍa*. I'm unclear on exactly what *khaṇḍa* is. See Sanskrit *khaṇḍaśarkarā* or Marāthi *Kākvi*.

[237] It is not clear if Maṇḍana endorses a transformation to immediacy or if *aparoksatvam* is coming simply from the removal of *samskaras*. From the latter perspective he would sound much closer to Śaṅkara.

[238] It is important to note that Śaṅkara describes a type of contemplative practice he calls "*parisaṅkhyāna*" in the third part of the prose section of the *Upadeśasāhasrī*. Furthermore I have doubts whether this section can be safely attributed to Śaṅkara. For more information, see Sundaresan 1998; Kunjunni Raja 1990; and Mayeda's introduction to his critical edition of the *Upadeśasahāsrī*.

liberation does not arise when one is told 'You are that' (*tat tvam asi*). Hearing the sentence once and understanding its literal meaning does not free a person from *samsāra*. Further repetition is required.[240] (2) *Prasaṅkhyāna* is subject to an injunction (*vidhi*) like a ritual. It is enjoined as something to be performed after verbal knowledge.[241] (3) *Saṃskāra*s from perception negate the knowledge that 'I am *brahman'*.[242] (4) Perceptual knowledge negates knowledge gained from the Upaniṣads.[243] 5) No one is seen to be liberated from *samsāra* simply by understanding a sentence. If someone is, he must have done repetition in a previous birth.[244] And (6) the rules of conduct of a *sannyāsin* would not be approved by the *śāstra*.[245]

Śaṅkara's *prasaṅkhyānavādin* has a striking resemblance to Maṇḍana. He points out the problem of indirect knowledge, and more specifically the problem of *saṃskāra*s and the conflict between perceptual knowledge and verbal knowledge. The major point of difference is the claim that *prasaṅkhyāna* involves an injunction. Maṇḍana vociferously refutes the application of injunctions for self-knowledge throughout the *Brahmasiddhi* whereas Śaṅkara's *prasaṇkhyānavādin* insists on them. Though Maṇḍana

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239 Śaṅkara also uses *prasaṁcakṣā* synonymously with *prasaṅkhyāna* (US 18.9).
240 US 18.9-10.
241 US 18.11-12.
242 US 18.13.
243 US 18.14.
244 US 18.15. This probably refers to someone like Vāmadeva who was liberated while in his mother's womb from listening. See BU 1.4.10 and *Aitareya Upaniṣad* 2.1.5.
245 US 18.16. Śaṅkara's *prasaṅkhyānavādin* is implying that one must accept the injunction of *prasaṅkhyāna*. If the injunction is not accepted then the rules of conduct for the *paramahaṃsa saṁnyāsin* would not be approved by the *śāstra*, and in that case he may or may not follow the rules. If someone gives up these rules, he is someone who has risen to (reached the stage of) a *paramahaṃsa* and then fallen (*ārudha patitatvam*). But it is not desirable to conceive of a *paramahaṃsa* who can fall from that stage for it threatens the whole concept and institution of *sannyāsa*. See Ānandagiri's commentary for an explanation.

does employ the term '*anucintanam*', he does not specifically use the term '*yukti'* in connection with his contemplative practice. Unlike Śaṅkara, Maṇḍana does not use the term '*prasaṅkhyāna*' in the context of contemplation, but rather for *doṣaparibhāvana*, similar to its use in Patañjali's Yoga.

It is likely that Śaṅkara was refuting a popular concept held by other Advaitins and not directly targeting Maṇḍana in the *Upadeśasāhasrī*.[246] Ma ṇḍana appears to fall somewhere in between Śaṅkara and the doctrines Śaṅkara is attacking, and thus he may represent some other Advaita lineage existing at that time. However, Śaṅkara's critiques are still applicable to Maṇḍana. Śaṅkara refutes *prasaṅkhyāna* in two ways. He asserts a proper method for understanding Upaniṣads sentences and points out the illogical contradictions inherent to *prasaṅkhyāna*.

Let us look briefly at Śaṅkara's method in the US for recognizing the self before we expand on his method in the next chapter. Śaṅkara explains that the Upaniṣads impart knowledge when they are understood through the specific methods of negation (*neti neti*) and continuity and discontinuity (*anvaya-vyatireka*).[247] He writes,

> Knowledge that the *ātman* is always free is from the sentence and not otherwise (from *prasaṅkhyāna*). The understanding of the meaning of the sentence is preceded by the memory of (the implied) meanings of words (US 18.190).

[246] Ānandagiri does not specifically state Maṇḍana as the *pūrvapakṣa*, but does clarify the opponent as being an advaitin, literally saying an idea belonging to one's own herd (*svayūthyam matam*).
Sureśvara specifically attacks Maṇḍana by building on Śaṅkara's arguments.
[247] US 18.96; 18.177-183; 18.190-1.

> The meanings of words are firmly remembered (understood) by (the process of) continuity and discontinuity. In this way one understands the self is free from sorrow and action (US 18.191).[248]

The sentences work by negating the false superimpositions of one's self onto the mind and body. When superimpositions are dissolved, then the reality of one's self is recognized. This takes place specifically through a "great sentence" (*mahāvākya*) such as "You are that" (*tat tvam asi*) or "I am *brahman*" (*aham brahmāsmi*). When two words such as 'you' and 'that' are equated through grammatical apposition, the sentence appears contradictory. The lack of syntactical contiguity (*yogyatā*) appears to thwart the complete sense of the sentence and forces one to look for the implied meanings of the words. In this case one must discover the continuous presence of pure existence which underlies one's self and worldly phenomena, and one must drop anything which is discontinuous, such as the mind, body, and external objects. Through this method of reasoning based on the sentence, the self is determined as non-dual. Complete understanding of non-duality might not occur the first time one hears the sentence. It may take an extended time to understand a sentence correctly, requiring a process of reflection and contemplation.[249] The purpose of listening, reflection, and contemplation is only to understand the sentence. *Mokṣa* occurs at the same time the sentence is finally and clearly understood.[250]

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248 *nityamuktatvavijñānaṃ vākyād bhavati nānyataḥ |*
vākyārthasyāpi vijñānaṃ padārthasmṛtipūrvakam || US 18.190 (my translation).
anvayavyatirekhābhyāṃ padārthaḥ smaryate dhruvam |
evaṃ nirduḥkham ātmānam akriyaṃ pratipadyate || US 18.191 (my translation).

249 For example, see Śaṅkara's commentary on *Brahma Sūtra* 4.1.2 (*liṅgāt ca*).

250 US 18.103-4.

Despite the brief summary of Śaṅkara's method, a fundamental question still remains: How does the sentence generate immediate knowledge? In one passage, Śaṅkara's *prasaṅkhyānavādin* raises the following objection:

> (Immediate knowledge) is not gained from the sentence like the satisfaction gained from eating. (Immediate knowledge of *brahman* from) understanding the sentence is like preparing *pāyasam* from cow dung (US 18.201).[251]

This objection draws on common experience. I cannot satisfy my hunger by reading a menu, or enjoy the taste of sweetness from hearing the word 'sugar'. Similarly, the claim that words are an independent means to direct knowledge is as foolish as trying to make a sweet dish from cow dung. The analogy implies that there is no logical causal process possible because there is an unbridgeable gap between experience and words, which are incompatible species. This objection sounds perfectly legitimate, yet it is too strong a claim and overlooks Śaṅkara's understanding of *brahman* and experience. Śaṅkara gives the following response:

> This is indeed true, indirect knowledge is from sentences dealing with objects other than the self. But this is not the case with reference to the inner self, which is like the gain of the number[252] (US 18.202).

In order to follow Śaṅkara's position we must return to Advaita's conception of self-luminosity (*svaprakāśatvam*), a critical presupposition of Śaṅkara's method of reasoning. According to Śaṅkara, *brahman* is pure undifferentiated consciousness that is

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[251] *yathānubhūyate tṛptir bhujer vākyān na gamyate* |
vākyasya vidhṛtis tadvad gośakṛtpāyasīkriyā || US 18.201 (my translation).
Pāyasam is milk boiled with rice and sugar.
[252] *satyam evam anātmārthavākyāt pārokṣyabodhanam* |

other than the mind, yet illumines the mind. *Brahman* is the ground and presupposition of the subjective experience that lies at the core of an individual. Advaita makes this claim based on an important position that consciousness is self-illuminated (*svaprakāśa*), self-evident *(svasiddha*), and immediate (*aparokṣa*). As self-luminous consciousness, *brahman* is immediately evident as the real subject and illumines all objects, but cannot itself become an object of perception. It does not require anything outside of itself, such as a means of knowledge, another source of consciousness, or a separate cognition, to reveal itself. Whenever a thought arises in the form of a mental modification (*vṛtti*), it is immediately known due to the self-luminous nature of *brahman*. As consciousness, *brahman* is always the subject and immediately present in all experience and cognition. It cannot be objectified.

Self-illumination is a foundational theory guiding Śaṅkara's method of reasoning to find the self. If *brahman* is already existing and self-luminous, then no new experience or objectification of *brahman* is necessary or even possible. The process of *anvyaya-vyatireka* used through *mahāvākyas* such as 'You are that' does not objectify *brahman*, but removes the veil of ignorance that causes the erroneous superimposition of limiting adjuncts onto *brahman*. When one's self is already immediately present, then words can lead to direct knowledge through this negative process of removing obstacles that obstruct knowledge of an immediate entity. Identity statements such as "You are that" strip away false identities associated with the self. *Mokṣa* accomplishes what is already accomplished. There is no action that needs to be done. The only goal is to

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pratyagātmani na tv evaṁ saṇkhyāprāptivad adhruvam || (my translation).

recognize the self as it truly is because an individual is already non-dual *brahman*. This is not a new experience because your self is awareness itself, the substratum underlying each and every experience and cognition.

Śaṅkara points out a number of problems in the *prasaṅkhyānavādin's* position. He explains that an insistence on *prasaṅkhyāna* will falsely elevate action to an independent *pramāṇa*, require injunctions, make liberation limited by time, negate the *prāmāṇyam* of the Upaniṣads, and contradict *brahman's* self-luminous nature.

Prasaṅkhyāna is an additional mental action of methodical repetition, which is necessary because the *mahāvākya* is unable to fulfill its goal of imparting self-knowledge.[253] But if *prasaṅkhyāna* is an action, or a combination of action and knowledge, it will fall into a number of problems explained previously. An action produces a new result and all products are finite and time bound. If *mokṣa* is a result it will last for a finite period of time and will be other than one's self.[254] This contradicts the Upaniṣads and the timeless and infinite nature of *brahman*. *Mokṣa*, which is not separate from *brahman*, is already accomplished and thus outside the sphere of action.[255]

Śaṅkara critiques *prasaṅkhyāna* for falling under human volition, similar to his critique of *upāsanā*. He also points out the illogical dependency of knowledge and action in the *prasaṅkhyāna* theory:

The 'number' is a reference to the 'tenth man' story explained below.

[253] US 18.19, US 18.206, also Ānandagiri on US 18.200, 206.

[254] US 18.207; Ānandagiri on US 18.19.

[255] US 18.209-10.

> Should there not be (knowledge) from listening alone, then there certainly must be an injunction (of repetition). Even before listening to the teaching, it is accepted that the self exists by itself. (18.102)[256]

Śaṅkara argues that, if immediate knowledge does not take place from the Upaniṣads, then there must be an injunction (*vidhi*) for repetition like all other actions known from the Vedas.[257] In this case, action becomes primary, and by extension, the *prasaṅkhyānavādin* must admit that that self-knowledge is dependent on action and the volition of the individual rather than dependent on the nature of the object. This is problematic, because individually dependent mental action does not need to match the object of inquiry. It may or may not be valid knowledge and can be reduced to belief or imagination. The problem with *prasaṅkhyāna* is its insistence on action after the *pramāṇa* has completed its function. This does not make sense in Śaṅkara's theory of knowledge. It is superfluous, like repeatedly turning the head and opening the eyes again to see an object already seen. Śaṅkara clearly states that liberating knowledge occurs at the time of listening when there are no obstructions.

> Valid knowledge arises at that time (of listening) and results in freedom from hunger, etc. There is no doubt about the meaning of sentences such as 'You are that' in the past, present, and future. (18.103) [258]
>
> There is no doubt that valid knowledge of one's self indeed arises (at the time of listening), because the self, whose nature is awareness, has no obstacles. (18.104)[259]

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[256] *śrutamātreṇa cen na syāt kāryaṃ tatra bhaved dhruvam |*
vyavahārāt purāpīṣṭaḥ sadbhāvaḥ svayamātmanaḥ || 18.102 (my translation).
No one doubts the existence of his or her self because it is self-evident.

[257] Also see US 18.21.

[258] *aśanāyādinirmuktyai tatkālā jāyate pramā |*
tatvamasyādivākyārthe triṣu kāle 'py asaṃśayaḥ || US 18.103 (my translation).

[259] *pratibandhavihīnatvātsvayam cānubhavātmanaḥ |*

The *prasaṅkhyānavādin* agrees that the Upaniṣads are the proper *pramāṇa* for self-knowledge, but asserts the *śabda pramāṇa* is indirect and thus incomplete. Śaṅkara argues that if *prasaṅkhyāna* is required then it must be considered an independent *pramāṇa*. This is due to the fact of making self-knowledge dependent upon *prasaṅkhyāna*. Śaṅkara is not averse to repetitive contemplation (*nididhyāsana*) for all students. Some students may require an extended period of time to remove the obstacles to their understanding; but for Śaṅkara, *nididhyāsana* is dependent on *śravaṇa*. In fact, *nididhyāsana* can be understood as an advanced mode of *śravaṇa*. Śaṅkara sees the *prasaṅkhyāna* position as reducing *śravaṇa* to a subsidiary position, dependent on mental activity. If this is taken to its logical conclusion, the *prasaṅkhyānavādin* should claim that *prasaṅkhyāna*, and not the Upaniṣads, is the *pramāṇa* for self-knowledge. But *prasaṅkhyāna*, or any other form of action, is not a means of knowledge like perception or inference, and it is unreasonable to consider it an independent *pramāṇa*. In addition, this leads to the repugnant consequence of destroying the validity of the Upaniṣads and undermining the entire Advaita pursuit.[260]

Śaṅkara believes that the *prasaṅkhyānavāda* not only destroys the epistemological method of Advaita, but also contradicts self-luminosity. *Prasaṅkhyāna* presupposes a distinction and distance between the individual and *mokṣa*. Advaita identifies *mokṣa* and *brahman*; therefore, if the individual is distinct from *mokṣa* he is

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jāyetaiva pamā tatra svātmany eva na saṃśayaḥ || US 18.104 (my translation).
This means there are no obstacles in understanding the self through a sentence like 'you are that' because of the process of a*nvyava vyatireka*.

also distinct from *brahman* with the result that his nature is not already free. Śaṅkara writes,

> There should be this (*prasaṅkhyāna*) if a difference between the listener and the object of listening is desired. In this case, there will be a violation of the desired goal. (Therefore) this speech (idea of *prasaṅkhyāna*) is illogical in all ways (US 208).[261]

In addition, this distance between seeker and *brahman* implicit to the *prasaṅkhyāna* position reinforces the desire to produce a new immediate experience of *brahman*, and cultivates the idea that one must reach or merge with *brahman* in some manner. Reaching, gaining, or requiring a new experience of *brahman* is mutually contradictory to its self-luminous nature.[262] An insistence on producing new immediate knowledge is only possible if *brahman* is not self-luminous. *Brahman* cannot come into or go out of experience and it can never be objectified or reached.

2.4.3: In Maṇḍana's Defense

Śaṅkara provides a sustained and penetrating critique of *prasaṅkhyāna*. Accepting these arguments on the merit of Śaṅkara's authority may be tempting, but let us step back and question how well they target Maṇḍana. A careful analysis of Maṇḍana reveals that he attempts to counter many of the arguments that Śaṅkara makes.

Maṇḍana and Śaṅkara have some clear differences in their incorporation of action in the pursuit of liberation. Maṇḍana was not a *sannyāsin* and places more emphasis on

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[260] US 18.199-200.

[261] *śrotṛśrotavyayor bhedo yadīṣṭaḥ syād bhaved idam |*
iṣṭārthakopa evaṃ syān na yuktaṃ sarvathā vacaḥ || US 18.208 (my translation).

[262] See Śaṅkara on *Brahma Sūtra* 1.1.4.

the householder stage (*gṛhastha āśrama*). Though he accepts the possibility of liberation through the *saṁnyāsa āśrama*, he claims that engaging in *vaidika karman* throughout one's life is a more efficient path toward liberation than renouncing *karman* through *saṁnyāsa*. He endorses *karman* as a helpful accessory to knowledge according to the principle of *saṃyogapṛthaktva* (sevarality of conjunction).[263] Based on this principle, *karman* can have a subsidiary function of aiding self-knowledge along with its intended respective results, such as attaining heaven. Maṇḍana also accepts that *karman* can act for purification.[264] His endorsement of this variation of *karma-jñāna-samuccaya* would be disconcerting for Śaṅkara and may have instigated critiques of him by later Advaitins.[265] However, we should not conflate Maṇḍana's incorporation of ritual *karman* with his contemplative practice. Maṇḍana does not equate them and discusses them in separate contexts. In his opinion, ritual action is optional, and acts as an indirect catalyst that is more efficient than *saṁnyāsa*. *Prasaṅkhyāna* on the other hand, is a specific indispensable practice required for making verbal knowledge *aparokṣa*.

Maṇḍana does not clarify the distinction between knowledge and action with the precision of Śaṅkara, but I believe he does not view *prasaṅkhyāna* as an action, certainly not in the way he understands ritual action. Maṇḍana's use of terms like *upāsanā* and *bhāvanā* for contemplation may lead to the doubt that his contemplation is a type of

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[263] BrSi, pp. 36-37.
[264] BrSi, p. 36.
[265] Though Śaṅkara is considered to be hostile to *karma*, he does incorporate it in certain ways. See *Brahma Sūtra* 3.4.42 and discussions of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.22. But Śaṅkara only gives an endorsement of *karma* in the context of gaining purity of mind and for *karma yoga*, or when required for sensible exegesis. He negates the utility of *karma* in most instances unlike Maṇḍana's open insistence on it.

mental action similar to other *upāsanā*s, consisting of some type of worship, guided conceptualization, or imaginary superimposition.[266] However, Ma ṇḍana views his contemplation as a continued analysis of verbal knowledge (*anusandhāna* or *anucintanam*), and not as a guided conceptualization. In addition, this repetition does not have an unseen (*adṛṣṭa*) future (*bhavya*) effect like Vedic ritual or *upāsanā*. It culminates in immediate knowledge like the result of eating.[267]

Maṇḍana makes several other points that block any accusation of action. He claims in multiple places that *mokṣa* is not an effect.[268] *Mokṣa* is not a future result and is not something that is accomplished or produced like the results of *karman*, for if *mokṣa* begins it must also have an end. Maṇḍana further argues that *brahman* is not something that can be attained for it is already one's self.[269] In an argument reminiscent of Śaṅkara, he explains that *mokṣa* is the manifestation of one's already existing form by the removal of conditioning adjuncts. Removal of these adjuncts, or coverings, does not produce *brahman*, but reveals *brahman*, which was and is always there.[270] This explanation of *brahman* and self-knowledge appears to negate any action in *prasaṅkhyāna* and implies that *prasaṅkhyāna*, similar to Śaṅkara's method, works through negation and removal. In addition, it does not contradict self-luminosity because *brahman* is not reached, gained, or produced. Maṇḍana's reiteration that *brahman* is an existing object, and that

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266 If this is taken to its extreme conclusion, one could reduce Maṇḍana's entire process to *bhakti* or visualization.
267 See BrSi, pp. 152, 154-5 and Śaṅkhāpāni's commentary on pp. 291-4 and 265-6.
268 BrSi, pp. 36, 77.
269 BrSi, p. 120.
270 BrSi, p. 37.

knowledge can only illumine what already exists, hints at an implicit distinction between object-dependent knowledge and individual-dependent action.

If *prasaṅkhyāna* is not a volition based action then it does not falsely raise action to an independent *pramāṇa* and subsequently negate the *prāmāṇyam* of the Upaniṣads. Maṇḍana also devotes the entire third chapter of the *Brahmasiddhi*, the *niyoga kāṇḍa*, to refuting any possibility of injunctions with reference to self-knowledge from words, the repetition of that knowledge, or the immediate manifestation of knowledge. Implicit to his argument against injunctions is his belief that knowledge only deals with existing objects and is not subject to volition or action.

2.4.4: Unresolved Issues with Maṇḍana

We can reconstruct a number of counter arguments to Śaṅkara from Maṇḍana's *Brahmasiddhi*; however, several issues remain unresolved. Maṇḍana's understanding of *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* self-knowledge is potentially problematic. Does his distinction of *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* knowledge contradict self-luminosity? Mediate knowledge of one's immediately known self is a contradiction. It cannot be termed "knowledge," yet at the same time it is not fully an error. Perhaps a type of faith or belief is a more appropriate term. In order to maintain the *parokṣa*/*aparokṣa* distinction, one has to explain the epistemological movement from mediacy to immediacy; but this is difficult with reference to self-knowledge. How does this transformation take place? Is a positive action of transformation congruent with the negative process or removing ignorance? Or is it possible to define transformation as a purely negative process?

Can Maṇḍana maintain the Upaniṣads' status as a *pramāṇa* if they only give *parokṣa* knowledge? If *parokṣa* "self-knowledge" is not immediate knowledge, but simply belief or conviction grounded in an assertion of the authority of the Vedas, and dependent on a mental process for immediacy, then the Upaniṣads are not an independent *pramāṇa*.

Another problematic issue is Maṇḍanas discussion of *saṃskāra*s and experience. Let us turn back to his sugar analogy. Maṇḍana employs this analogy differently than the neo-Vedantic example in the introduction, which dismisses language totally. He wants to maintain the importance of language while pointing out the problem of perceptual experiences that contradict one's knowledge. Maṇḍana claims that self-knowledge must be immediate and firm so that it directly conflicts with the experienced world.[271] But is Maṇḍana implying the necessity for a new experience of *brahman* or an experience where all contradictory mental impressions and perceptual data that contradict non-duality are absent? This is analogous to the sweet sugar, which is perceived as bitter. This analogy appears to imply that the sweetness of sugar is useless if it tastes bitter and one must work towards negating bitterness through an experience of sweetness. The knowledge that sugar is sweet is constant, but one's experience must conform to that knowledge.

A similar example to the bitter sugar is the perception of grief or anger during a play, even though one knows it is theatrical and unreal. Only at the conclusion of the actor's performance do these emotions cease. Yet why are these examples and their

corresponding experiences necessarily problematic? Are these experiences negating or contradicting one's knowledge? Perhaps one can comfortably hold knowledge even while facing contradictory perceptions. In fact, the analogy of the play is also used to illustrate a person possessing self-knowledge, who is an observer enjoying the play and the experience of emotions, yet simultaneously maintaining total clarity about the theatrical nature the play.[272] Maṇḍana's use of these examples lead to some confusion of whether he claims that one's experience of the world must change, or that one must maintain a mental state devoid of any perceptual experience in order to deal with the phenomenal world.

Maṇḍana explains that repeated contemplation strengthens the *saṃskāra* of non-duality and negates empirical *saṃskāra*s. How does this negation (*virodha*) work? Why would *saṃskāra*s of *brahman* negate empirical *saṃskāra*s? Are they necessarily mutually contradictory? And if they are a contradictory then does this necessitate the generation of new experience? Even if it does work, to what degree do empirical *saṃskāra*s need to be attenuated; completely or just to a certain degree that they do not obstruct self-knowledge? It is also not clear whether contemplation simply strengthens the knowledge *saṃskāra* or creates an entirely new *saṃskāra*, which is immediate in nature.

Maṇḍana argues for self-luminosity and does not explicitly commit to attaining a new experience of *brahman*; yet it is unclear whether he thinks self-knowledge is simply

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[271] BrSi p. 134.

[272] For example, see *Pañcadaśī* chapter ten, entitled "The lamp of the theater."

a strengthening of the *saṃskāra* generated from the Upaniṣads, the generation of a completely new and independent *saṃskāra*, or primarily the negation of contradictory *saṃskāra*s.[273] A new *saṃskāra* sounds like a new experience and may support Śaṅkara's critique that *prasaṅkhyāna* becomes an independent *pramāṇa*. If self-knowledge is just a strengthening of the Upaniṣad *saṃskāra*, then the *pramāṇatvam* of Upaniṣads is maintained as in Śaṅkara's *nididhyāsana*; however, how can a strengthened *saṃskāra* tally with the *parokṣa/aparokṣa* distinction? Śaṅkara's avoidance of *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* knowledge bypasses this dilemma.[274] Can strengthening a *saṃskāra* transform knowledge from *parokṣa* to *aparokṣa* or is there simply a gradual process of deeper clarity? It this transformation a new experience and does it take place gradually or suddenly? Unfortunately Maṇḍana was not focused on these questions and does not clearly resolve them in the *Brahmasiddhi*. And perhaps he would not consider these questions as a productive line of inquiry. In a particular pithy, yet telling passage, Maṇḍana beautifully states the difficulty in grasping the nature of Advaita's liberation and the apparent efficacy of effort to accomplish what already exists. He writes,

> Therefore, just as an uncovered object, as though covered, requires human effort so that it is as though manifested. So too, the reality of the *ātman,* though

[273] In the US Śaṅkara does not discuss *saṃskāra*s as a part of his own view of the knowledge process, but he does in some other contexts in terms of knowledge obstacles as well as justifying the validity of living while liberated (*jīvanmukti*). See Br.U.1.4.7, Br.U 1.4.10; BS 3.4.51; BS 4.1.15; BG 5.13; BG 8.10; and GK 3.44.

[274] Śaṅkara makes no *parokṣa/aparokṣa* distinction, but he does so implicitly in other texts through terms such as *jñāna* and *vijñāna* or *jānāti* and *abhijānāti* when they are used in the same sentence. Unlike Maṇḍana however, Śaṅkara does claim that *parokṣatvam* is due to the limitations of language, but rather due to a lack of eligibility and preparadness (*adhikāritva*). The terminological distinction refers to the individual's phenomenological experience and the process of removing ignorance and gaining greater clarity.

> uncovered, is as though covered, and it is manifested as though by someone's effort. That is enough.[275]

2.4.5: Concluding Notes on prasaṅkhyāna

Śaṇkara's conception of contemplation (*nididhyāsana*) has some important differences when compared to that of Maṇḍana. The primary difference between them concerns language. Maṇḍana claims language is necessarily mediate while Śaṅkara asserts the capacity of language to generate immediate knowledge when the object of knowledge is itself immediate. Śaṅkara's position allows him to maintain the *pramāṇatvam* (validity) of the Upaniṣads. He purposely holds *nididhyāsana*, as well as *manana*, as a subsidiary position to *śravaṇa* by including it as an extended mode of *śravaṇa*. If *nididhyāsana* can be reduced to a mode of *śravaṇa*, then the validity of the *śabda pramāṇa* is maintained because there is no question of raising repetition to an independent *pramāṇa* and no reason to focus on an extra process in addition to *śravaṇa*. Maṇḍana's focus on *prasaṇkhyāna* ostensibly separates *śravaṇa* and *nididhyāsana* and potentially demotes *śravaṇa* to a subsidiary position. Advaitins such as Śaṅkara perceive a threat to the tradition and the Upaniṣads in this position.

Compared to Maṇḍana, Sankara expresses less concern with the perception of the world or the problem of *saṃskāra*s contradicting knowledge of non-duality. There are occasional places where he implicitly accepts this type of theory, but he does not explicitly concern his writing with it. Śaṅkara does not describe the learning process in terms of obstructing dualistic *saṃskāra*s and strengthening the *saṃskāra* of non-dual

275 *tasmād yathātirohitam api tirohitam ivābhivyajyata iva prayatnāpeksam, tathātmatatvam apy*

knowledge. A corollary of the difference over *saṃskāra*s is the possible difference they have between requiring and not requiring a non-dual experience. The absence of the *parokṣa/aparokṣa* distinction in Śaṅkara saves him from some epistemological dilemmas, yet at the same time makes it difficult for him to articulate the individual process of the knowledge event taking place in time even though *mokṣa* is never truly gained.[276]

We can clearly delineate a number of differences between the two *ācāryas*; however, if we take more of an overview we can also resolve some of them. Śaṅkara tends not to discuss repeated contemplation, but occasionally accepts it. Śaṅkara does not delve into a theory of *saṃskāra*s, but appears to directly or implicitly accept it. Even though Saṅkara dismisses the distinction between *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* self-knowledge, he may implicitly accept some notion of them when he distinguishes terms like *jñāna* and *vijñāna*. [277] Perhaps most importantly, it is difficult to decisively state any clear differences in the actual contemplative practices that Śaṅkara's and Maṇḍana's students engaged in. The lack of texts used as manuals for contemplative practice leaves the scholar to speculate on practice based only on the tenuous ground of epistemological debates.

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atirohitaṃ tirohitam iva prayatnād abhivyajyata iveti puṣkalam | BrSi, p. 37 (my translation).

[276] Though I think he tried to articulate this through terms like *jñāna* and *vijñāna*. Śaṅkara's Advaita is not totally systematic. He intelligently left a number of provocative issues unresolved, opening his philosophy to fluid adaptation and interpretation. There are a number of related technical issues that led to intra-Advaita debates in later centuries, such as the ontological nature of *mokṣa* and the liberating cognition, the existence of ignorance, and the process of perception.

[277] Discussed in chapter 6. I believe these discrepancies show breaks between Śaṅkara's wielding of epistemology as a polemical tool and the necessity of recognizing the practical realities of students and their process of gaining clarity. To a certain degree Śaṅkara is not rigid in his terminology and layers terms with different meanings according to their context.

One difficulty in resolving the questions I raise in this chapter is whether we should analyze Maṇḍana from a strict epistemological standpoint or as a compassionate teacher. There may be a disjunction between wielding epistemology as a polemical defense with the practical realities that students face. His theory of *saṃskāra*s and the *parokṣa*/*aparokṣa* distinction may be an attempt to more realistically capture the learning process and difficulties that Advaita practitioners face, rather than an attempt to philosophically justify his method. Śaṅkara generally writes from the perspective of the highest qualified student (*uttama adhikārin*). He includes *nididhyāsana* only for the students of dull or mediocre intellect, though most people will fall into this category.

Maṇḍana comes dangerously close to walking the tightrope of the Naiyayika's *parokṣa śābdajñānam* and Pūrva Mīmāṁsaka's *karman* and *vidhis*. Perhaps Maṇḍana wants to have his cake and eat it too. He wants to maintain a separation between repetition and injunctions, the co-presence of the *pramāṇatvam* of Upaniṣads and the necessity of repetition, and a combination of the *parokṣatvam* of language with Advaita's metaphysical understanding of self-luminous *aparokṣa brahman*; but these pairs may not be ultimately compatible.

Chapter 3: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge

Advaita's method of engaging the Upaniṣads, otherwise known as the *śruti* (literally "that which is heard"), as a means of self-knowledge (*pramāṇa*) is often misunderstood or overlooked, a surprising fact, considering its fundamental importance in the pursuit of *mokṣa* and its importance in Indian philosophy as a whole. For Śaṅkara, *śruti* independently provides knowledge about self and *brahman* as well as the methodology to communicate that knowledge. A fundamental distinction of action and knowledge is evident in Śaṅkara's writing. Physical, mental, and vocal actions are only indirectly helpful to the main process of studying *śruti*. From a historical perspective, this approach to *śruti* as a means to *brahmavidyā* is one of the basic differences separating Śaṅkara from other Vedāntins of the time, particularly those who emphasized some combination of action and knowledge (*karmajñānasamuccayavādin*s). From the standpoint of Śaṅkara, improper use of *śruti* jeopardizes the viability of the *mokṣa* pursuit. It leads to illogical methods and the loss of any possibility of self-knowledge. The questions that arise then are how does the Advaitin approach the texts? What methods are employed in studying these texts? And what relationship do these texts and textual methods have with *nididhyāsana*?

This chapter discusses Śaṅkara's understanding of the Upaniṣads as a direct means of immediate self-knowledge. It begins with a brief discussion of the difficulty of pinpointing different types of self-knowledge in Śaṅkara's writing such as propositional

and non-propositional self-knowledge. It then develops our previous knowledge and action discussion, explaining how some textual study, premised on a distinction of theory and practice, contradicts Śaṅkara'a orientation to the Upaniṣads. I then move to discuss different means of knowledge accepted by Advaita and why Advaitins claim testimony (*śabda pramāṇa*), in the form of the Upaniṣads, is the only means of self-knowledge. Showing *śabda pramāṇa* as the means to *brahmavidyā* according to Śaṅkara, I present Śaṅkara's specific methods of interpreting and communicating Upaniṣadic sentences, and exemplify these methods with textual case studies of "You are that" (*tat tvam asi* [*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.8.7]); "*Brahman* is truth, knowledge, infinite" (*satyam jñānam anantam brahma* [TU 2.1.1]), and "About this *ātman* (one can describe it as) not that, not that" (*sa eṣa neti nety ātmā* [BU 3.9.26]).

3.1: The Ambiguity of Knowledge Types

Before discussing Advaita's accepted sources of knowledge, we need to address a difficulty concerning *nididhyāsana*. Śaṅkara does not make any clear distinction between different types of self-knowledge. He uses a variety of terms for liberating self-knowledge such as *jñāna*, *vijñāna*, *vidyā*, *prajñā*, *pratipatti*, and *darśaṇa*. Sometimes these are in compounds such as *ātmajñāna* (self-knowledge), *brahmavidyā* (knowledge of *brahman*), or *samyagdarśaṇa* (correct vision). Despite these different terms and phrases we do not know whether he accepts all as meaning direct liberating self-knowledge or if he has in mind some distinctions of knowledge types connected to the progress of study. Generally it appears that he means direct liberating knowledge for all the terms except in the rare occasions that he uses two terms (such as *jñāna* and *vijñāna*)

in the same sentence. The difficulty this presents concerns contemplative practice. Surely there is some change or deepening of knowledge as one continues to study and contemplate, but how can we, and should we, attempt to describe this change? How do we distinguish the knowledge we have before and after contemplation? And what kind of knowledge does one contemplate? The answers to these questions are important in our discussion, but elusive due to Śaṅkara's ambiguous usage. They are also difficult because of the unique ways epistemology and metaphysics interact in Śaṅkara's system.

Scholars and practitioners may be tempted to assume a simple hierarchy of knowledge types based on the triple method of *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana*. This might look something like the following: (1) At first, without having undergone proper *śravaṇa*, one may gain some basic preliminary ideas about non-duality. This would not be knowledge, but perhaps some form of belief, an entertainment of Advaita propositions that lack firm conviction or justification. (2) Then the student gains propositional knowledge from proper *śravaṇa* involving firm conviction and justification, but this propositional knowledge may still be subject to philosophical doubts. (3) The student then gains an unshakable conviction through *manana*. This knowledge is so confident that it cannot be dislodged by doubt. (4) Next, the student contemplates this doubtless knowledge to remove any psychological issues and dispositions that may disturb self-knowledge. This is necessary because the propositional knowledge of unity is constantly challenged by sense experiences presenting diversity as well as our dispositions to think in a non-unitive fashion. Contemplation makes the propositional knowledge "firmer," in

the sense of not being subject to disruption. Finally, the student achieves an immediate recognition of *brahman* as non-dual, a form of non-propositional knowledge.

The reader will notice that, given the discussion of the *prasaṅkhyāna* meditation in the preceding chapter, the above description outlining the knowledge process is subject to a number of criticisms. The difficulty with this simplistic description is its distinction of propositional knowledge and non-propositional knowledge. The assumption is that everything before *brahmavidyā* is some form of propositional, intellectual, and conceptual knowledge based on grasping the meanings of the Upaniṣads, and that *brahmavidyā* is something else. *Brahmavidyā* is some kind of deeper direct spiritual knowledge or knowledge by acquaintance. This distinction appears to mirror the difference made by Maṇḍana between mediate (*parokṣa*) verbal knowledge and immediate (*aparokṣa*) *brahmavidyā*. *Nididhyāsana* is what would facilitate transition from one to another. However, both distinctions presuppose or lend themselves to the *prasaṅkhyāna* view that all textual self-knowledge is inherently mediate and requires contemplation to become immediate, a position I am critical of as an interpretation of Śaṅkara.

The problem with understanding knowledge from the Upaniṣads as only descriptive or conceptual and *nididhyāsana* as a necessity for *brahmavidyā*, is that it contradicts Śaṅkara's theory that testimony is a direct means to *brahmavidyā*. Śaṅkara upholds the status of the Upaniṣads as a means of self-knowledge at all costs and refuses to share that status with any other means of knowledge. We may try to preserve the distinction of propositional knowledge and non-propositional knowledge by saying that

both are possible with regard to a single object of knowledge. For example, in the story of the tenth man, the tenth man first gains propositional knowledge of his self, and upon further listening and reflection gains immediate knowledge that he is the tenth. In this case there is a change from propositional to non-propositional knowledge through testimony without depending on another means or compromising the immediacy of his self-understanding.

Another solution is to see self-knowledge gained from *śravaṇa* as immediate non-propositional knowledge from the beginning, but also as appearing as though mediate and propositional due to obstacles and a lack of qualification (*adhikāra*) for self-knowledge of a purest type. This view attributes authority to the Upaniṣads as the sole means of knowledge; however, it may not do a good job of recognizing the final cognition of *brahmavidyā* or pinpointing exactly when ignorance is removed. Nevertheless, this is what I think must be our judgment about Śaṅkara. In this perspective it is problematic to use terms like "intellectual knowledge" for *śravaṇa* before *brahmavidyā*, but I think we could use descriptive phrases such as "deficient knowledge" or "*brahmavidyā* with obstacles." It is more useful to make cautious divisions within *brahmavidyā* where all types of self-knowledge deriving from *śravaṇa* are considered direct and immediate though they have varying amounts and types of obstacles that prevent them from appearing direct.

But whether taking a position of *parokṣa* leading to *aparokṣa* self-knowledge or one that dismisses such a distinction, we should recognize that as a phenomenon that would seem to be propositional self-knowledge on the part of the Advaitin student prior

to a final liberating cognition, if Śaṅkara's teaching is correct. But what change is there to be to self-knowledge in *nididhyāsana* prior to *brahmavidyā* that could distinguish it from self-knowledge derived from *śravaṇa* and *manana*?

This lends itself to another distinction about self-knowledge that is potentially useful in talking about *nididhyāsana*, the distinction of "occurrent" and "non-occurrent" knowledge. In *śravaṇa* and *manana*, and perhaps when a student first begins contemplation, there may be occurrent knowledge, which requires an overt or implicit assent to the propositional knowledge that he or she is *brahman* and non-dual. In *nididhyāsana* this may include an intentional process of drawing the mind away from sense objects and distractions and giving assent to the proposition. We may speculate that with time *nididhyāsana* facilitates a transition to non-occurrent knowledge where self-knowledge, though still propositional (at least in appearance), remains subconscious and latent in the form of knowledge impressions or dispositions (*saṁskāra*). This transition to non-occurrent knowledge marks a deepening of knowledge that allows it to be easily available because one only needs to trigger the *saṁskāra* to retrieve the knowledge.

Even though the general assumption is that *brahmavidyā* occurs after or through *nididhyāsana* and that *nididhyāsana* is then no longer necessary, this view is not always clearly evident in Śaṅkara's writing. Śaṅkara does not specify a chronological position for *nididhyāsana* with reference to an immediate cognition of *brahmavidyā*. It is not clear whether *nididhyāsana* comes before and culminates in liberating immediate self-knowledge or if it is used after such knowledge according to him. There are a few

textual passages that lend themselves to an interpretation that contemplation is still possible, perhaps even necessary, after direct *brahmavidyā* takes place due to residual disturbances from problematic dispositions.[278] In this perspective *nididhyāsana* is not the catalyst for immediate *brahmavidyā* but a practice for maintaining, securing and/or stabilizing it. This interpretation would also reject use of categories of "occurrent" and "non-occurrent" knowledge in *nididhyāsana*. If *nididhyāsana* can come after non-propositional *brahmavidyā* and target non-propositional knowledge, it involves more than occurrent or non-occurrent knowledge, which are both forms of propositional knowledge.

Even though we may feel impelled to make some distinctions between types of self-knowledge, we must remember that there is no sharp division between mediate propositional and immediate non-propositional self-knowledge within Śaṅkara's writing. Once we label and qualify knowledge prior to *brahmavidyā* as propositional, we inevitably take a position privileging a controversial interpretation of Śaṅkara. This may not be a problem, for attempting to interpret and clarify Śaṅkara's ideas is an important endeavor. And indeed, my reading of Śaṅkara favors the views of Sureśvara, Padmapāda, and the Vivaraṇa school who focus on direct knowledge arising from *śravaṇa,* not Maṇḍana, Vācaspati, and the Bhāmatī school who recognize propositional self-knowledge as distinct from non-propositional self-knowledge and emphasize the importance of contemplation for the transition. However, the scholar must be aware of the limitations of bifurcating Śaṅkara's concepts. Perhaps the greatest difficulty we have is describing what Śaṅkara thought about the transition from descriptive knowledge to

278 BUbh 1.4.7, 1.4.10, BGbh 4.18, BSbh 3.2.51

direct knowledge or from a type of modal knowledge (*vṛttijñāna*) to a knowledge of intrinsic being (*svarūpajñāna*). This is all the more true when we realize that *brahmavidyā* is a strange knowledge that does not fit epistemic categories in English and may indeed be indescribable in any language. *Brahmavidyā* is clearly not propositional. It is *sui generis*, yet it still occurs in time, comes from a knowledge source, and is closely related to whatever form of deficient self-knowledge one has before *bramavidyā*. As I reconstruct Śaṅkara's view we must keep in mind that Śaṅkara does not give a clear epistemological account of how this knowledge takes place. It is difficult to understand how a conceptual truth can become understood and non-conceptual, though this leap is supposedly self-evident to the liberated Advaitin. Later Advaitins did systematically speculate on how this occurs, though I don't think there is an entirely adequate account given by anyone. This is not necessarily a defect in the Advaita position. There are multiple twists that make this topic even more complex. It is to be taken as inherently problematic how to define liberation and self-knowledge according to Śaṅkara. This is recognized in the doctrine of *anirvacanīya*, "inexplicability," about which however I have more to say below. Śaṅkara's conception of liberation attempts to remove itself from the boundaries of ordinary discourse, debate, and causal epistemology.

We must also be aware of the limitations and subtle presuppositions of translating Sanskrit terms, such as *jñāna* and *brahmavidyā*, into Western philosophical language. One may attempt to map Advaita's concepts onto Western epistemology in an effort to articulate material in more useful and precise ways or to engage in comparison.

However, there are many pitfalls. The Western terms may be framed with assumptions that do not fit the Indian material.

3.2: The Problem of Theory and Practice

Śaṅkara understands the Upaniṣads as a means to immediate *brahmavidyā*, like perception for objects with color. The Upaniṣads are like that a mirror reflecting one's true identity. One only needs to look at the mirror and see the image. At that point knowledge immediately takes place and the mirror's function is complete. Śaṅkara believes the Upaniṣads are to be approached in a similar way because liberation is simply the recognition of one's self through the mirror of the Upaniṣads.[279] Yet how this approach translates to the ground reality of the practitioner is somewhat confusing. Unlike the simplicity of the mirror analogy, reading the texts and studying with a competent teacher are certainly not guarantees for knowing *brahman*. Few students suddenly understand non-duality when an Advaita teacher states, "You are non-dual." There is a vast difference between simply gaining a thorough semantic and philosophical grasp of the Upaniṣad's message of non-duality and having direct liberating insight into non-duality. Many Advaita practitioners and traditional scholars (*paṇḍit*s) spend their entire lives studying the *śruti,* yet still consider themselves lacking complete liberating knowledge. Textual study is generally a long and drawn-out process, unlike the immediate knowledge gained in perception. There is a gradual deepening of knowledge and clarity, with numerous breakthroughs and 'aha' moments; as well as cyclical processes, learning how to navigate the texts, seeing new layers of meaning, revisiting

previously studied passages, and allowing textual wisdom to penetrate one's cognitive and psychological understanding of self, world, and god.

If we hypothetically grant the validity of the Upaniṣads as a means for self-knowledge and "try to feel from the inside" Śaṅkara's approach, then how does one assimilate what appears to be an abstract philosophical idea – all is one – into one's self-understanding and life? Can we label such a process a "practice"? And if so should we call the texts "theory"? Before moving to a detailed discussion of Śaṅkara's methods for engaging with the Upaniṣads we need to understand the conflicts inherent to a theory – and – practice orientation towards textual study. For Śaṅkara it is vital that students discard certain theory – and – practice orientations and embrace an orientation that would employ the Upaniṣads as a valid and immediate means of self-knowledge. It is here that we find many problematic stances in encounters between practitioner and text and the difficulty of understanding *nididhyāsana* in a discourse of practice.

There are two primary ways we commonly view theory and practice. The first is gaining conceptual knowledge about a particular subject matter and then using practice to turn concept into application. The theory provides a conceptual underpinning that models or at least facilitates practical application.[280] For example, a person may understand an abstract topic like physics and then apply it in technologies for energy production. The application may or may not give greater clarity to the science of physics, but is a functional application of the knowledge. A second type of theory – and – practice

[279] US 18.103 and 18.109.
[280] Mohanty 1990, p. 19.

distinction is used in everyday language. Reading a book on surgery does not result in an ability to perform surgery. Such a simple division of theory – and – practice is evident in many of our daily activities. There is of course a relationship. But one must cook in order to understand the subtleties of cooking, or drive a car to understand really how to drive.[281] In this view, one uses theory to learn how to do something in order to convert conceptual knowledge to direct knowledge or to produce some result.

Generally, one assumes texts are inherently theoretical; thus it would seem Advaitins must take the indirect theoretical verbal knowledge in the Upaniṣads and convert it into direct knowledge. This orientation naturally leads to a focus on contemplation (or meditation) as the practice that transforms theory to knowledge. It is "knowing-how" to do something as opposed to propositional "knowing that." Oftentimes the importance of contemplation is then focused on, separated from the texts, and elevated to a special status; an orientation in which contemplative practice functions independently of the texts and culminate as an immediate experience of non-duality. These contemplation produced experiences are then identified as liberation. In some sense, liberating insight, a recognition of self-nature, is a transformative process in which one sees his or her self as complete, free of fear, and not subject to pain and suffering. However, "transformation" is happening only on the level of one's psychological response to self-knowledge. Liberation is not a product of transformation, and the self does not change and is not affected by either knowledge or ignorance.

[281] Mohanty also discusses a conception of theory practice as "a logical structure of propositions constituting a system, rationally grounded on some self-evident axioms" such as in Euclidean geometry

Theory – and – practice approaches, such as those found among *karmajñānasamuccayavādin*s and *prasaṅkhyānavādin*s presuppose an action subsequent to textual study and bring questions to the Upaniṣads such as what is to be accomplished (*kim kartavyam*)? And by what and how is that to be accomplished (*kena kartavyam*)? Here we see that even though Mīmāṁsā theory is embedded in arcane discussions of ritual hermeneutics, its basic approach to search for actions and results in a sentence is quite natural and presupposes a theory – and – practice orientation. This orientation towards the texts considers *śruti* a map that one must follow to reach the goal. *Śruti* does not have the power to bring a person to that goal, but provides directions that must be followed. It gives knowledge of how to do something. Śaṅkara attempts to avoid this orientation because it contradicts his distinction of knowledge and action and falls into the problems associated with action discussed in the previous chapter. The primary problem inherent in the theory – and – practice paradigm is a misunderstanding of Śaṅkara's view that the Upaniṣads convey the nature of *brahman* through the words of a teacher without depending on any additional practice or any other *pramāṇa* (though one must have the proper *adhikāritva* for this to occur).

Śaṅkara's textual method is a radical reorientation to Upaniṣadic texts, a reorientation that also extends to contemplation. For most people, verbal knowledge does not convey immediate (*aparokṣa*) knowledge similar to perception. In everyday usage testimony typically provides indirect knowledge by description because it makes known an object that is removed from the hearer either spatially or temporally or both. When

(Mohanty 1990, p. 20).

reading newspapers or listening to a valid source *(āpta vākya*) we understand phenomena outside of our immediate environs. This indirect (*parokṣa*) knowledge may be perfectly valid, yet the object remains distant. For example, while sitting in a room a friend walks in and informs me someone is waiting for me outside. I accept his words as truth because he is a respectable source. This is indirect yet valid propositional knowledge, knowledge by description, because a person is indeed waiting outside. When I step outside and see the person, then I have direct perceivable knowledge, knowledge by acquaintance. Both the indirect and direct knowledge are valid, though epistemic primacy attaches to direct knowledge because of the direct acquaintance with the object of knowledge. Furthermore, we may say that the ultimate starting point or source that establishes my indirect knowledge is direct knowledge (i.e. my friend's visual perception of the person outside). In contrast, however, according to Śaṅkara, in special cases where the object is immediately at hand, words can convey direct knowledge that is immediate like perception. For example, saying, "This is a pot," to a person who does not know what a pot is. Śaṅkara argues that words have this capability in the unique case of *ātman* or *brahman*, because *ātman*/*brahman* underlies all experience, is intrinsically reflexive, and is immediately available at all times as one's self-luminous self. Upaniṣadic language immediately reveals *brahman* as one's self-luminous self or could do so when wielded with specific teaching and exegetical methods that remove ignorance. The Upaniṣads function like one's eyes as a direct means of immediate knowledge in the form of verbal testimony (*śabda pramāṇa*), but must be employed properly to uncover self-knowledge.

The classic example of this stated earlier is the story of the tenth man who recognizes himself as the missing tenth person when told.

This understanding of the language in the great sentences appears somewhat counterintuitive, an issue that Śaṅkara raises himself. How does language, which deals with indirect knowledge of things, is limited, intrinsically dualistic, and dealing with names, forms, actions, and qualities, possess the capacity to reveal directly and immediately the unobjectifiable *brahman*? Understanding Śaṅkara's approach to sentences in the Upaniṣads answers this question, and is the key to understanding his methodology and view of *nididhyāsana*. For Śaṅkara, the Upaniṣads both reveal the existence of *brahman* and directly convey that knowledge through methods intrinsic to their language. As I will explain, there are a number of particular verbal methods that the Upaniṣads employ to accomplish this difficult task, such as negative language, continuity and discontinuity, and secondary implication. Advaitins situate these methods in their wider systematic metaphysical and epistemological system in order to cultivate a coherent and mutually strengthening flow between philosophy, method, and direct liberating knowledge.

Understanding the *śruti* as a direct means of *brahmavidyā* to be employed like one's eyes runs across the distinction of theory and practice. Studying the texts (theory) is itself the "practice" for Śaṅkara. Understanding the texts is synonymous with immediate *brahmavidyā*, after which there is nothing more to practice. This is analogous to Advaita's theory of visual perception where knowledge takes place simultaneously with perceiving the object. I explain the perception theory below.

If one insists on using the term "practice" in Śaṅkara's Advaita, then it should be as a method for understanding the meanings of the texts. In this sense Advaita praxis is composed of the triple-method of *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* (not *nididhyāsana* alone). However, the triple method is more accurately described as employing a source of knowledge, not practicing theory. This terminology maintains its object-dependent knowledge content and precludes separating practice from the texts. In the context of Advaita, "practice" more accurately denotes the various methods for gaining *adhikāritva,* methods which hone the mind's capacity to be a proper container for text-sparked knowledge.[282] Restudying texts is not additional practice; it is done to remove any doubts or misconceptions about what the Upaniṣads are teaching.

3.3: The Six Means of Knowledge

It is important to understand Advaita's epistemology and justification for relying on the Upaniṣads before turning to Śaṅkara's textual methods. A source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) is an instrument (*karaṇa*) for a specific type of cognition. The action of the instrument, which is conceived as a unique or special cause, triggers knowledge.[283] For example, the eye is the instrument for vision, and is a cause of visual perception along with the object perceived and the self. Each source of knowledge does not contradict another, for it only tells us about those things that cannot be known by any other

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[282] In a way, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* are similar to means for *adhikāritvam* in that they remove obstructions to knowledge, but their dependence on the *śruti* and its knowledge content separates them from independent practices like meditation.

[283] Datta 1960.

means."[284] A *pramāṇa* can be invalid for four reasons: (1) it reveals something that is already revealed by another *pramāṇa*; (2) another *pramāṇa* contradicts the knowledge; (3) the knowledge is doubtful or ambiguous; (4) it reveals nothing.[285]

Śaṅkara did not discuss *pramāṇa*s in clear detail; however, post Śaṅkara Advaita Vedāntins, who were more concerned with the fine points of epistemology, distinguish six sources of knowledge (*pramāṇas*). There are no more. They agree that this categorization is in keeping with Śaṅkara's writing. The six *pramāṇas* are: (1) perception (*pratyakṣa*); (2) inference (*anumāna*); (3) comparison (*upamāna*); (4) postulation (*arthāpatti*); (5) non-cognition (*anupalabdhi*); (6) testimony or word (*śabda*). In the next section I outline these *pramāṇa*s following Dharmarājādhvarīndra's *Vedāntaparibhāṣā*, perhaps the most influential and first Advaita text dedicated solely to an explanation of Advaita epistemology. Understanding the sources of knowledge will help us understand Śaṅkara's emphasis on *śruti* and delimit the nature and method of *nididhyāsana*.

3.3.1: Pratyakṣa (Perception)

All Indian philosophical traditions accept some form of *pratyakṣa*, or perception. For Advaitins, perception includes both external and internal perception. External perception results from the contact of a sense organ and its object. Internal perception is the direct knowledge of mental states such as love, hate, and anger without use of the sense organs.[286] The individual has five senses, sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell,

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284 BUbh 2.1.20, *Vedāntaparibhāṣā* (VP) Ch.1, p. 5 (page numbers for the *Vedāntaparibhāṣā* refer to Madhavananda's 1963 edition).
285 Rambachan 1991.
286 VP, Ch. 1, (Madhavananda 1963, p. 66).

with the corresponding visual, auditory, tactual, gustatory, and olfactory sensory experiences. Advaita has a specific theory about how the sense organs (*indriyas*) work. According to Advaita there are subtle organs (*jñānendriyas*), which are imperceptible and made of the same subtle nature as the mind, residing within the physical organs. Perception depends on the subtle organs, which function through the corresponding physical organs.[287] The subtle organs can move with ease to modify their respective objects just as the mind has the capacity to move quickly and take the shape of its objects.

In external perception each sense organ has its respective place. Despite their close association, there is no overlap or conjoining of roles that could result in complications. The sense organs contact their object in two major ways. The organs of sight and hearing both reach our to the object, while touch, taste, and smell receive their object in their respective locations. Perceptual cognition occurs when the mind, illumined by the self, assumes a thought modification corresponding to the object. Vedānta, like the Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Saṁkhyā, and Mīmāṁsā philosophies, recognizes a first stage of perception which is indeterminate and nonlinguistic. This stage is followed by a perceptual judgment which is conceptual and linguistic.[288] The objects of internal perception (*sākṣī pratyakṣa*) are mental states such as feelings and emotions as well as ignorance. Such internal states do not have an unknown existence. For example, the knowledge that "'I am happy' is invariably a perception."[289] In internal perception, the mind does not reach outside of the body to contact an object. The sense organs, which

[287] VP, Ch. 1 (Madhavananda 1963, p. 15-16).
[288] Mohanty 2000, p. 19.

are designed only to move outwards, are not capable of knowing internal mental states. Internal states are known immediately without the need of a corresponding mental modification because they are directly presented to the witnessing awareness.[290]

Perception requires that a subject objectify an object, creating a dualistic framework. *Brahman* is non-dual and cannot be known as an external object. Therefore, self-knowledge cannot be gained through perception. Śaṅkara is adamant that "*brahman's* relation with anything cannot be grasped, it being outside the range of sense perception. The senses naturally comprehend objects, and not *brahman*."[291]

3.3.2: *Anumāna* (Inference)

Except for the Carvākan materialists, all Indian philosophical systems accept inference (*anumāna*) as a valid means of knowledge. *Anumāna* literally means "knowing after," and comes from the Sanskrit "*anumiti*", meaning "the consequent knowledge" (from *anu*-after and *miti* –knowledge). Inference is knowledge that follows from another

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[289] VP, Ch. 1 (Madhavananda 1963, p. 16).
[290] Mohanty 2000, p. 19.
[291] BSbh 1.1.2 (Gambhirananda 1996, p. 17).
An interesting topic in relation to perception is the use of clairvoyant abilities attained through meditative practices. Clairvoyance, or other types of Yoga based extra-sensory perception (*yaugika pratyakṣa*), may be claimed to be a unique means for self-knowledge, however, Advaita argues that clairvoyance is simply a form of perception where the mind and subtle sense organs work independently of the gross bodily organs. The mind and subtle sense organs can be expanded without the physical organs after they become focused and powerful through meditative practices. This allows perceptual cognition without external behavior. Clairvoyance is not truly extra sensory because the perception is still dependent on the subtle organs (*jñānendriyas*), and thus, is unable to reveal the self. Even if Yogic insight is hypothetically accepted, this insight still exists in the form of subject and object, a duality not possible in the knowledge of *brahman*. One could also hypothesize that there is the possibility of having direct revelation like a Vedic *ṛṣi*, however Advaitins believe that Vedic revelation is not all that possible and limited to *ṛṣis*. Furthermore, if one accepts the idea of Vedic revelation then one also accepts the Vedas, so why spurn the knowledge found in them in favor of the unlikely possibility of new revelation?

knowledge. The *Vedānta Paribhāṣa* defines *anumāna* as "the instrument of inferential knowledge (*anumiti*). And the latter is produced by the knowledge of invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*) purely in its character as the knowledge of invariable concomitance."[292]

Invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*) implies a universal relation or coexistence in the terms used in the inference.[293] The classic example is the mountain, known to be on fire because there is visible smoke on it. In this situation "wherever there is smoke there is fire" is the universal relation. The knowledge of this relationship through observation and generalization leads to direct inference.[294] *Vyāpti* can be "apprehended by the observation of concomitance when no violation of the latter has been noticed."[295] Unless there is reason for doubt, the repetition of *anumāna* is not necessary because *vyāpti* can be discerned from on experience. Advaita makes use of two models of syllogistic inference in *anumāna*.

Model one:

1) Proposition to be proved or established (*pratijña*)- There is fire on the hill.
2) The reason (*hetu*)—Because the hill has smoke.
3) Universal proposition supported by example (*udāharaṇa*)—Whenever there is smoke there is fire.

Model two:

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292 VP, Ch. 2 (Madhavananda 1963, p. 68).
293 VP Ch. 2 (Madhavananda 1963, p. 73).
294 Datta 1960.
295 VP (Madhavananda, 1963 p.73).

1) Example (*udāharaṇa*)—Whenever there is smoke there is fire.

2) Application (*upanaya*)—The hill has smoke.

3) Conclusion (*nigamana*)—Therefore the hill has fire.[296]

Anumāna is deductive reasoning based on the application of a universal proposition to a particular case, and is dependent upon perception in order to find an invariable concomitance and the reason as qualifying the inferential subject (the hill). Due to this restriction, *anumāna* is limited to the sphere of perception. Thus any knowledge beyond the means of perception, such as self-knowledge, is not knowable through inference.[297] A constant relationship (*vyāpti*) between the self and anything else is not possible because the self is non-dual, and inference is not possible in the absence of any concomitance. "Even when the mere effect (i.e. universe) is cognized, one cannot ascertain whether it is related to *brahman*."[298]

3.3.3: *Upamāna* (Comparison)

Advaita, Nyāya, and Mīmāṁsā accept *upamāna*, or comparison. Dharmarāja defines *upamāna* as "the instrument of the valid knowledge of similarity."[299] *Upamāna* is the process where object A is known to be similar to object B because of the perceptual comparison of B's similarity to A. The traditional example used by Advaita to illustrate comparison is the cow and the *gavaya* (a type of wild ox). A man who knows cows after

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[296] VP Ch. 2 (Madhavananda 1963, p. 75).
[297] Rambachan 1991, p. 26.
[298] BSbh 1.1.2 (Gambhirananda 1996, p. 17).
[299] VP Ch. 3 (Madhavananda 1963, p. 83).

seeing them in the city travels to a forest. There he sees a *gavaya*. Upon seeing the *gavaya* he has the cognition that "this thing is like a cow", and learns that *gavayas* look like cows and cows look like *gavayas*. The judgment of the cow's similarity to the *gavaya* is formed by the perception of the *gavaya's* similarity to the cow he already knows.[300] The resulting knowledge is *upamāna*. Although *upamāna* is not a case of perception, it is still dependent on the sense organs. For example, the knowledge of the cow and *gavaya* is not possible without it. Due to this dependency, *upamāna* is also limited to the sphere of perception, and therefore, cannot reveal the self.

3.3.4: *Arthāpatti* (Postulation)

Advaita anda Mīmāṁsā accept *Arthāpatti*, the assumption, supposition, or postulation of a fact to explain an inexplicable fact (*artha*=fact and *āpatti*=supposition).[301] *Arthāpatti* is defined as "the assumption of an explanatory fact (*upapada*) from a knowledge of the thing to be explained (*upapadya*).[302] A common example to illustrate *arthāpatti* is the situation of Devadatta. Devadatta is fat and stout, however he does not eat during the day. A fact must be postulated to solve these contradicting circumstances, that Devadatta must eat at night in order to remain fat. Another example is the man who is alive but not at home. If the man is alive he must be either inside or outside his home. If he is not inside the home the only other possibility, that he is outside, must be postulated.[303] *Arthāpatti* may appear similar to the hypothesis in Western logic, but there are some

[300] VP Ch. 3 (Madhavananda 1963, p. 83).
[301] Datta 1960.
The Naiyāyikas believe postulation is a form of inference.
[302] VP Ch.5 (Madhavananda 1963, p. 117).

important differences. A hypothesis does not always solve a conflict or contradiction and connotes a tentative supposition that is pending verification and therefore subject to change. *Arthāpatti*, as the only possible explanation, carries absolute certainty.[304]

Arthāpatti is valid when only one possible explanation can resolve inexplicable facts. When there are many possible explanations, the validity of postulation is not absolute because one explanation may contradict another. For example, a person may suppose that one supreme omnipotent God created the world, however it is also possible that multiple gods created the world. The presumption that there can only be one supreme creator is negated as definitive knowledge due to the other possible explanations. *Arthapatti* is also ultimately limited to the sphere of sense perception, because the sense organs are needed to identify the inexplicable facts; therefore postulation is unable to reveal the self.

3.3.5: *Anupalabdhi* (non-cognition)

The fifth *pramāṇa*, *anupalabdhi*, is non-cognition or non-apprehension, a *pramāṇa* which only Advaita and Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṁsā accept.[305] Non-cognition is knowledge of the non-existence of an object or its attributes within a given locus.[306] The knowledge that a vase is not on a table, or that a flower has no fragrance are both examples of non-cognition. Non-cognition must occur in the appropriate situation to reveal valid knowledge. For example, if the room is dark, then the non-cognition of the vase on the

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303 VP Ch. 5 (Madhavananda 1963, p. 119).
304 Datta 1960.
305 The Naiyāyikas, for example, believe that absence is perceptible.
306 Datta 1960.

table is not absolutely valid because the *pramāṇa* is blocked by the darkness. Even if the vase is on the table, one could still not see it.[307]

The non-existence of the vase or the flower's fragrance is not direct perception because such non-existent objects are not available for contact with the sense organs.[308] There is still a dependence on perception (the eyes must see the table), but it is not direct perception that gives rise to non-apprehension, thus Advaita differentiates perception and non-cognition. Because non-apprehension is ultimately dependent on sense perception it cannot impart self-knowledge.

3.3.6: *Śabda* (Verbal Testimony)

All schools of Indian philosophy, other than the Cārvakans, Buddhists, and Vaiśeṣikas accept verbal testimony as a source of knowledge about the world when uttered by competent speakers. Śabda is a major way in which we gain knowledge and includes ordinary bits of everyday knowledge (*laukika*), what we should do, should not do, and supersensous extraordinary (*alaukika*) realities.[309] For Śaṅkara, only testimony (*śabda*), in the form of the authorless and infallible Upaniṣads, possesses the capacity to both reveal the existence of *brahman* and directly convey that knowledge through methods intrinsic to Upaniṣadic language. Perception, and other pramāṇas that depend on perception, cannot grasp *brahman* because the sense organs only see outwards and perception is based on a subject/object duality. Instead they become secondary means,

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[307] VP Ch. 6 (Madhavananda 1963, p. 127-8).
[308] VP Ch.6 (Madhavananda 1963, p. 130-1).
[309] Mohanty 2000, p. 24.

aiding in reflecting and analyzing knowledge gained from the Upaniṣads and for gaining mental purity and the qualifications for understanding self-knowledge.

Advaita approaches the *śabda pramāṇa* from a unique standpoint, and believes *śabda* is the essential and only means for self-knowledge. Untangling the confusion surrounding verbal testimony helps to establish the relationship of mental purity and self-knowledge and to clarify the role of contemplation in gaining liberation. The following section clarifies the role and importance of the *śabda pramāṇa*, explains Śaṅkara's methodology for employing words, and provides a detailed case study of specific Upaniṣad sentences.

Śabda literally means an articulate or inarticulate sound. The *śabda pramāṇa* refers to knowledge gained from written or spoken verbal expressions.[310] Śaṅkara does not provide us with a definition of *śabda*, so we have to look much later to chapter four of the *Vedanta Paribhāṣa*:

> Now verbal testimony is being discussed. That sentence is a means of knowledge in which the relation (among the meanings of words) that is the object of its intention is not contradicted by any other means of valid knowledge.[311]

The *śabda pramāṇa* gives knowledge of both empirical reality and ultimate reality. In Advaita it imparts the knowledge of ultimate reality revealed by the *śruti*, that the self of the individual is the self of the universe. Advaita Vedānta accepts the entire Vedic corpus consisting of four Vedas, the *Ṛg*, *Yajur*, *Sāma*, and the *Athārva*. Śaṅkara divides the Vedas into two broad sections: the *karmakāṇḍa*, which explains rituals for

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[310] Datta 1960.

achieving various ends, and the *jñānakāṇḍa*, which focuses on metaphysical and theological speculations. "Vedānta" (*veda* + *anta*: end of the Veda) literally refers to the *jñānakāṇḍa* section,[312] which is primarily located in the last portions of each Veda, and is synonymous with the Upaniṣad texts. The Upaniṣadic texts are recognized as the source of true knowledge of the nature of God and one's self. To claim otherwise would negate the Upaniṣads as a reliable means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) and relegate their traditions to a *nāstika* (heterodox) position that the Upaniṣads are not an authority, a position held by the Buddhists and Cārvāka materialists.

In order for *śruti* to reveal the self, the words must have an authentic source and be free from defects and doubt. Any *pramāṇa* that contains an internal source of doubt would require verification, and thus would lose its status as a means of knowledge. Both Advaita and Mimamsa agree that the *śruti* is a infallible knowledge source because the Vedas are eternal, uncreated, and without authorship.[313] According to Advaita, in line with the Mīmāṁsakās, the eternal *śruti* is authorless and not the product of human minds.[314] During each cycle of creation it is revealed by *īśvara* to the *ṛṣis* (seers), who then transfer the knowledge to subsequent students. According to Śaṅkara, the Upaniṣads would be invalid if created by the human intellect, because independent reason and postulation cannot lead to self-knowledge. Reason and postulation can suggest

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[311] VP Ch.4 (Madhavananda 1963, p.86).
[312] "Vedānta" can also be interpreted as the "culmination of knowledge," namely liberation.
[313] Rambachan 1991.
[314] See Murty (1959) for a lengthy discussion of revelation in Advaita Vedānta.

possibilities about ultimate reality, but are unable to reveal absolute conclusive knowledge.

Advaita derives its knowledge from a triple canon (*prasthānatrayam*) of the Upaniṣads, *Bhagavadgītā,* and *Brahma Sūtras*, though they pay extra attention to the Upaniṣads as the root source of knowledge about ultimate reality. [315] The dialogues found in the Upaniṣads enjoin various meditations (*upāsanā*s) and describe the nature of *brahman*, the absolute formulation of truth and reality. Among the Upaniṣads are a handful of great sentences (*mahāvākyāni*) esteemed by the Vedānta traditions, which are an important source to understand Śaṅkara's *nididhyāsana*. In Śaṅkara's interpretation, those Upaniṣad sentences indicate the unity of self and *brahman*. There are four primary *mahāvākyas*, one from each of the four Vedas: "*brahman* is knowledge" (*prajñānaṃ brahma* [*Aitareya Upaniṣad* 3.5.3]); "I am *brahman*" (*aham brahmāsmi* [*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10]); "You are that" (*tat tvam asi* [*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.8.7]); and "This self is *brahman*" (*ayam ātmā brahma* [*Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*]).[316] I am not clear where and when this list of *mahāvākya*s become prevalent. Śaṅkara does not explicitly list them, though their importance is self-evident in his commentaries and by the number of times he cites them.[317]

In order to understand Śaṅkara's interpretation of the *mahāvākya*, we need to understand some basic concepts of the Advaitin's theory of meaning and understanding

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[315] The BG is considered *smṛti*, but based on the Upanisads. The BS is an independent text, but its purpose is to unify the disparate passages in the Upaniṣads.
[316] Potter 1981, p. 59.

of sentences. According to the Indian grammatical tradition there are three meaningful segments of language. Morphemes (*varṇa*) combine to create words (*pada*), and the words compose sentences (*vākya*).[318] Advaita, in agreement with the M īmāṃsakas, believe that a word refers primarily to a universal, for example, "cow" to "cowhood", the general from of a cow. Words are linked naturally and eternally with their referents rather then conventionally associated.

A sentence has two essential parts, the subject (*uddeśya*) and the predicate (*vidheya*), though a single word can stand for a sentence if the remaining word or words can be inferred from the context.[319] Following the P ūrva Mīmāṃsaka tradition, Advaita Vedānta accepts three necessary conditions for understanding a sentence, phonetic contiguity (*saṃnidhi*), semantic fittingness (*yogyatā*), and syntactic expectancy (*ākāṅkṣā*).[320] Of these *ākāṅkṣā* is the most important for a sentence must have a complete expression of thought. A sentence cannot lack syntactic unity and cannot leave the hearer needing more information to complete itself.

Indian philosophers developed a rich philosophy of language, especially in explaining how sentences, which are a collection of words, can convey a unified

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317 The list is accepted in the later tradition. For example, see *Pañcikaraṇa* 19 (The prevailing judgment is that the *Pañcikaraṇa* is not of Śaṅkara's authorship but there is some doubt. See Vidyasankar 2002, pp. 1-35).
318 Potter 1981, p. 55.
319 Singh 1990.
320 See chapter four of Kunjunni Raja 2000, for a clear discussion of these conditions. Some Advaitins accept a fourth condition of the speaker's intention (*tātparyajñāna*). See Vedanta Paribhaṣā IV (Madhavananda 1963, p. 86).

meaning. Two primary theories were developed to solve this question.[321] The *anvitābhidhāna* theory, embraced by the Prābhākara Mīmāṃsakas, takes the view that the unitary sense of the sentence arises directly from the collection of the words. The words of the sentence present their individual meanings as well as their mutual relationship.[322] According to the *abhihitānvaya* theory, followed by the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsakas, the sentence sense is understood indirectly through the recollection of the individual words. The individual words only convey their individual word meanings, and the word meanings convey the mutual relation. When hearing a sentence we must understand each separate word meaning and these meanings are put together in the sentence meaning according to the three conditions or *ākāṅkṣā, yogyatā* and *samnidhi*.[323] Śaṅkara did not specify whether he agrees with the *anvitābhidhāna* theory or *abhihitānvaya* theory;[324] however, most later Advaitins advocated the *abhihitānvaya* theory.[325]

3.4: Śaṅkara's Method

Advaita teaching methodology is designed to lead students to direct recognition that his or her self is *brahman* by means of the Upaniṣads, and specifically the *mahāvākyas*, which trigger this liberating knowledge. Even if *śruti* is hypothetically

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[321] Grammarian philosophers such as Bhartṛhari put forward a third theory termed *sphoṭa*, in which the sentence is considered an indivisible unit.

[322] Kunjunni Raja 2000.

[323] Kunjunni Raja 2000.

[324] Though at times he hints at accepting the *abhihitānvaya* theory. For example he writes in US 18.188 "The knowledge of the meaning of the sentence is also preceded by recollecting the meaning of the words" (Mayeda 1992, p. 192). Also see US 18.178.

[325] Grimes 1991.
Some Advaitins such as Prakāśātman and Bhāratītīrtha regarded both views as equally valid. See Datta 1960, pp. 300-7 (pp.250-58 in the 1997 reprint) for a discussion of Advaitin views on theories of meaning.

accepted as eternal and authorless, one may object to its validity, claiming that words are unable to reveal self-knowledge. Verbal testimony is generally indirect (*parokṣa*), and lacks the immediacy of perception (or possibly even that of an inference based on immediate perception). An opponent might claim Advaita is committing a disservice to the power of liberating knowledge, and question how words can reveal what perception cannot when hearing is dependent on perception. Śaṅkara accepts that words are limited to describing characteristics such as species (*jāti*), attributes (*guṇa*), action (*kriyā*), or relation and connection (*sambandha*), or symbolize objects possessing one or more of these qualities. However, the non-dual self is not a species or subject to action, and has no attributes or qualities.[326] The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* itself states the difficulty of using words to grasp *brahman*: "Before they reach it, words turn back, together with the mind."[327] In the *Kena Upaniṣad* we find a verse describing *brahman* as, "Which one cannot express by speech, by which speech itself is expressed."[328] This confronts the student with an epistemological puzzle. How is it possible to know the infinite self through the *śabda pramāṇa* if it is unobjectifiable as an object of knowledge and ungraspable by words?

Śaṅkara believes the Upaniṣads resolve this predicament by revealing the self's status as a unique object of knowledge available for specific verbal teaching methods. The non-dual self cannot be an object of perception, nor can it participate in the dualistic

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Datta writes that the major Advaita authorities such as Vācaspati, Citsukha, and Madhusūdana Saraswati accepted the *abhihitānvayavāda*.

[326] BUbh 2.3.6, BGbh 13.12, TUbh 2.1, KeUbh 1.3, US 18.30.

[327] *yato vāco nivartante | aprāpya manasā saha* | TU 2.4.1 and 2.9.1 (Olivelle 1996, p. 186). Also see BSbh 3.2.22.

relationship of the knower and object of knowledge. However, each individual is intimate with the self as his or her very existence and subjective awareness. Yet even though knowledge of one's own existence and awareness is self-evident and immediate, the self's distinctive non-dual reality remains unknown for the unliberated, the unenlightened. Ignorance of this reality spurs individuals to continue superimposing adventitious properties to the self, such as finiteness, mortality, and identity. Thus *brahman* simultaneously holds the status of being both known (as immediate existence/self-luminous awareness and as worldly objects) and unknown (as non-dual) when mistaken to be the superimposed limited individual self or worldly objects. The *Kena Upaniṣad* 1.3 describes the known and unknown nature of the self:

> It is far different from what's known. And it is farther than the unknown – so have we heard from men of old, who have explained it all to us.[329]

The verse implies that one cannot say, "I know the self" because knowledge refers to known objects and the self is not objectifiable. "I do not know the self," is also nonsensical because the self is all cognition, existence, and awareness.[330]

The Upaniṣads are capable of revealing direct knowledge of the self because the self is already immediately known and simply misapprehended or unrecognized. For example, a person who has never eaten sugar can only directly recognize its sweetness by tasting it, but a person who already knows the taste of sweetness can be reminded of

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[328] KeU 1.4. Olivelle, 1996, p. 227.
[329] Olivelle 1996, p. 227.
[330] Also see BGbh 13.12.

sweetness through a verbal description.[331] The Upani ṣads do not establish, grasp, or objectify *brahman*, nor are they practiced in order to create a positive result in the form of some transformation of indirect language to a new direct experience of *brahman*. They simply remove misapprehensions of one's self so that it stands self-revealed as non-dual. The Advaita orientation of removing self-ignorance and obstacles to self-knowledge is a crucial standpoint, opposed to the theory that knowledge creates anything new or fills the absence of knowledge. The theory of positive ignorance and obstacles accounts for the fact that the *ātman* is not properly recognized even though it is an accomplished reality, the ground of all experience, and the presupposition of every apprehension. Even though the self never changes and remains forever self-luminous, the removal of ignorance allows for a new vision of self-identity within the consciousness of the liberated person.[332]

Upaniṣadic language removes ignorance and any other obstacles to self-knowledge and immediately reveals *brahman* as one's self-luminous self when wielded with specific teaching and exegetical methods by a qualified teacher who is a master of the scriptures (*srotriya*) and rooted in self-knowledge (*brahmaniṣṭha*).[333] The question that arises then is what relationship these texts and textual methods have with the method of *nididhyāsana*? The most important soteriological methods of Śaṅkara's Advaita include negative language (*neti neti*), continuity and discontinuity (*anvaya* and

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[331] BGbh 13.12.

[332] We can say in self-knowledge ones identity becomes non-dual *brahman*, but terms like 'identity' do not really make sense in the context of liberation because it presumes an agent making an identity, and defines itself by creating boundaries and excluding other things.

vyatireka), and secondary indication (*lakṣaṇā*). However, as I will argue, these three are to be considered in reality as part and parcel of one single method.

3.4.1: Negative Language (*neti neti*)

One strategy Śankara uses is negative language (*neti neti* –literally 'not this, not this' [*na iti na iti*]). Though the Upaniṣads often name *brahman* as an entity, they employ negative language as a common device to prevent *brahman* from being known as an objective entity. For example, in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* we find the following verse: "This self is that which has been described as 'Not this, not this.' It is imperceptible, for it is never perceived; undecaying, for it never decays; unattached, for it is never attached; unfettered – it never feels pain, and never suffers injury."[334] The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* describes *brahman* as "What cannot be seen, what cannot be grasped, without color, without sight or hearing, without hands or feet…"[335] The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* says, "It has no sound or touch, no appearance, taste, or smell; It is without beginning or end, undecaying and eternal…"[336]The *Bhagavadgītā* says "That *brahman* is without any beginning. That is called neither being nor non-being."[337]

The negative language in the verses above attempts to avoid defining absolute reality as a thing in the world, and forms a type of Indian negative theology. It denies any nameability of *brahman*, its grammatical object. This is directly tied to *brahman's* unobjectifiable status, for the hermeneutical premise of negative language is the inability

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333 MU 1.12.
334 BU. 3.9.26. Madhavananda 1993 p. 387. Also see BU 4.4.15.
335 MU 1.1.6. Olivelle 1996, p. 268.
336 KU 1.3.15. Olivelle 1996, p. 240. Also see BU 2.3.6, 3.8.8, and 4.5.15.
337 Gambirananda 1995, p. 527. BG 13.12c-d. *anādimatparaṁ brahma na sattan nāsad ucyate*.

of predicates to apply to absolute reality.[338] To give positive predicates would reify the absolute to a finite entity. *Neti neti* is a means to negate all properties, conceptions, limitations, and identities that one naturally attempts to place on *brahman*; however, negative language cannot totally lose all reference. Passages using negative language often push their object away, allowing the unobjectifiable object to continually slip back and beyond. The purpose is not to be open ended and lapse into nihilism or an infinite regress, but to strip away all false conceptions and negate one's tendency to grasp after the absolute.[339] What appears to be an illogical infinite regress of negation is harnessed as a semantic force for understanding the absolute. Negative language will even turn onto itself, negating its prior negation. By turning back upon its referential delimitations it tries to free itself from those delimitations.[340]

Śaṅkara provides a concise explanation of *neti neti* in BUbh 2.3.6:

> How through these two terms 'Not this, not this' is it sought to describe the Truth of truth? By the elimination of all differences due to limiting adjuncts, the words refer to something that has no distinguishing mark such as name, or form, or action, or heterogeneity, or species, or qualities. Words denote things through one or other of these. But *brahman* has none of these distinguishing marks. Hence it cannot be described as, 'It is such and such,' as we can describe a cow by saying, 'There moves a white cow with horns.' *Brahman* is described by means of name, form and action superimposed on it, in such terms as, 'knowledge, bliss, *brahman'* (BU 3.9.28), and 'pure, intelligence' (3.4.12), '*brahman*,' and '*atman*.' When however we wish to describe its true nature, free from all differences due to limiting adjuncts, then it is an utter impossibility. Then there is only on way left, viz to describe it as 'not this, not this' by eliminating all possible specifications of it that have been known.[341]

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[338] Katz 2000, p. 41.
[339] This may not apply to all negative language, but concurs with Śaṅkara's understanding. See BSbh 3.2.22.
[340] Sells 1994, p. 8.
[341] Madhavananda 1993, p. 239.

Negative language sometimes constitutes half of a paradox that affirms positive and negative propositions at the same time. But this has a point: to ensure that the reader does not try and grasp an object and at the same time not fall into a kind of nihilism. There is a positive assertion of an entity but the negative language strips that entity of any limitations or finite objectivity. Negative language is not constructing new content or shifting one schema for another. Negative language stops the supply of content and deconstructs and rejects one's current expectations, ideas, beliefs, and perceptual patterns.[342] The positive and negative assertions that employ *neti neti* are clearly seen in Śaṅkara's method of *anvaya* and *vyatireka*.

3.4.2: The Method Called *anvaya* (Continuity) and *vyatireka* (Discontinuity)

This method of *anvaya/vyatireka* is a form of discriminative reasoning to understand one's self and underlies *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana*. It serves as a crucial exegetical strategy to unfold the enigmatic *mahāvākya*s in *śravaṇa*, to resolve doubts in *manana*, and to constitute the structure and content of *nididhyāsana*.[343] *Anvaya* and *vyatireka* are words used in other ways in classical Indian philosophies such as *Nyāya* (Indian logic) and *Vyākaraṇa* (grammar). The following example demonstrates Śaṅkara's usage:

> When a particular mental state (such as dreaming) (a) occurs, awareness (b) occurs (*anvaya*)

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[342] Forman 1999, p. 101.

[343] *Anvaya* and *vyatireka* can also be translated as "presence" and "absence" or "positive" and "negative concomitance." Śaṅkara also uses the synonymous Sanskrit terms *vyabhicāra* and *avyabhicāra* in the second prose chapter of the US. My discussion of *anvaya* and *vyatireka* is primarily based on chapter 18 of Śaṅkara's US. I have also depended on the discussions of *anvaya* and *vyatireka* in Cardona 1981; Halbfass 1991, pp. 162-177; Comans 1996, pp. 59-63; and Mayeda 1992, pp. 51-58.

When a particular state (such as dreaming) (a) is absent, awareness occurs (b) (*vyatireka*)[344]

Śaṅkara specifically employs this reasoning to determine the relationship of what persists and what does not persist between two things (*anuvṛttavyāvṛttasambandha*). Through this method he shows that one term is independent of another.[345] For example, when there is a pot (a) then there will be clay (b). But when that clay is shaped into a bowl, the pot (a) is absent and the clay (b) continues to exist. Using *anvaya/vyatireka* in this example distinguishes clay, the material that persists, from the transitory forms it may take. Properties such as pot, bowl, or plate are adventitious and not intrinsic properties of the clay.

Similarly there is a given correlation, *anvaya*, of awareness, which is present at all times with the mental states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. These states only occur with awareness. Awareness itself can never be absent. One cannot escape from one's own awareness, nor can one directly separate a particular mental state from awareness because awareness itself is not mutually exclusive of anything and not subject to the negative instance of *vyatireka*. However, separating awareness and a particular mental state is possible because the states themselves are mutually exclusive. For example, the dream reality and waking reality are mutually exclusive, pointing to the fact that awareness is independent of them even though it persists or is present in both of

[344] Anvaya – Fa, Ga; Vyatireka – nFb, nFa.
[345] Comans 1996, p. 60.

them. Through *anvaya/vyatireka* one discriminates awareness as the fourth state (*turīya*) underlying the three other states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep (*avasthātraya*).[346]

This form of *anvaya/vyatireka* constitutes a basic structure of Śaṅkara's reasoning (*yukti*, *tarka*, or *anumāna*). He uses this form to distinguish the self from the not-self, consisting of adventitious elements, properties, forms, and identities. It is only through this method that the self can be known as non-dual awareness and existence. In the US he states,

> (The method of) continuity-and-discontinuity ('coordinate presence and absence') of meanings and words, that should be the method, indeed, (which applies) here in the case of the ascertainment of the meaning of 'I.'"[347]

Śaṅkara specifically singles out the *anvaya/vyatireka* method of self-discrimination based on its coherence with numerous teaching methods (*prakriyā*s) and *mahāvākya*s in the Upaniṣads. For example, he discerns this method in the explanation of self-light (*svayam jyotiḥ*) in BU 4.3.[348] In this discussion between Y ājñavalkya and Janaka, Yājñavalkya distinguishes awareness from the sun, moon, voice, the dream world, and deep sleep. In the discrimination of the self from the five sheaths (*pañcakośaviveka*) in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* awareness is separated from the physical body, the subtle body, the mind, the intellect, and the causal-*ānanda* body. All of these

346 US 10.4, US 18.97, and Śaṅkara on MāUbh 7.
347 US 18.96. Halbfass 1991, p. 165.
348 See US 18.99.

deal with separating awareness underlying one's sense of self from everything else.[349] Śaṅkara compares this process to separating the *muñja* grass from the stalk.[350]

For Śaṅkara, *anvaya/vyatireka* is not to be used independently of the *śruti*. By itself it is just dry logic and will not lead to complete knowledge. [351] Nor is *śravaṇa* productive without *anvaya/vyatireka*, because *anvaya* and *vyatireka* are necessary in order to unlock the meaning of the sentences. One of the well known *mahāvākyas* for which Śaṅkara employs *anvaya/vyatireka* is "*tat tvam asi*", "You are that." This sentence occurs in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7 where Uddālaka teaches his son Śvetaketu the nature of the self:[352]

> Oh Śvetaketu, that which is this subtle essence, all this has got that as the Self. That is real. That is the self. You are that.[353]

In this sentence, "that" (*tat*), which has its antecedent as "existence" (*sat*) at the beginning of the section, at first appears to refer to the world of objects outside of the individual and "you" (*tvam*) refers to the finite sense of self constituting an individual's identity. However, this identity statement makes a logically inconsistent sentence because

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349 The method is also apparent in Śaṅkara's discussion of the *parisaṅkhyāna* contemplation in US prose chapter three and the contemplations found in KU 1.3.10-13, BU 2.4, and BG chapter six. Generally we see *nididhyāsana* as contemplation on the *mahāvākya* itself, but we also see this in a dilated form in the various *prakriyās* and the contemplations in KU, BU, BG and US. These *prakriyās* help the Advaitin to discover the meaning of the words in the *mahāvākya*. Then the *māhavākya* becomes a condensed seed version of larger *prakriyā*s. It holds the entire *prakriyā* along with the *anvaya* and *vyatireka* method in just a few words. In seeing the meaning of the sentence in *nididhyāsana* one is basically seeing the meaning of the whole *prakriyā*.

350 BUbh 4.3.7.

351 For example in BS 2.1.11 Śaṅkara says that self-knowledge cannot even be guessed at without the help of Vedas and that logic alone will not establish anything.
See BSbh 2.1.6 for arguments against dry logic.

352 Uddālaka repeats and explains *tat tvam asi* nine times to Śvetaketu.

the equation of subject and object, in the form of the individual and the world, is contradictory. This apparent paradoxical contradiction is not grounds for dismissing the sentence; rather it instigates the reader to inquire deeper into its meaning by employing *anvaya* and *vyatireka*.

In Śaṅkara's opinion, one must understand the true meaning of *tvam* to understand the sentence.[354] This is only possible through *anvaya* and *vyatireka*.[355] Śaṅkara explains that "you" refers to the subject as the *ahaṅkāra* (I notion). The *ahaṅkāra* is in reality simply awareness, yet this awareness is reflected in the mind (*cidābhāsa*) and is then superimposed onto mind. Due to this one believes the mind is the locus of awareness and possesses awareness as an attribute or product of the mind, analogous to a red-hot iron ball, where the heat and light of the fire is not easily distinguished from the iron constituting the ball. Through *anvaya* and *vyatireka*, Śaṅkara derives the true meaning of *tvam*, first separating it from the ego and then pointing it out as the unchanging self-luminous awareness underlying an individual's experience. *Tat* undergoes a similar process of superimposition and discrimination. All objects possess name (*nāma*), form (*rūpa*), and existence (*sat*-being). However, through *anvaya/vyatireka*, the Advaitin understands that only *sat* persists and is independent of both name and form. *Tat* is that *sat* which is not restricted by boundaries of space and

[353] CU 6.8.7. *sa ya eṣo 'ṇimaitadātmyam idaṁ sarvaṁ tat satyaṁ sa ātmā tat tvam asi śvetaketo* | (my translation).
[354] US 18.90.
[355] US 18.96.

time. It is one only, non-dual, and the undifferentiated universal existence (*sat*) pervading all names and forms.[356]

The verb "is" (*asi*) connects the two terms, showing that *tat* and *tvam* are referring to each other and making an identity statement. This is based on grammatical apposition (*sāmānādhikaraṇyam*), where two or more terms in a sentence have the same referent.[357] It is the lack of logical congruency (*yogyatā*) in identifying the primary limited meanings of the terms *tat* and *tvam*, which are not synonyms and contradict each other, that thwarts the complete sense of the sentence and instigates the reader to employ *anvaya*/*vyatireka*. The sentence equation employs a contradictory juxtaposition of terms, without which one would have no inclination to look deeper in the words to negate adventitious layers of their meanings. *Tat* prods the *anvaya* of *tvam* and vice versa. In the equation, *tvam* negates the mediacy (*parokṣatvam*) of *tat*, as existence away from one's self, and indicates *tat's* immediacy (*aparokṣatvam*) by equating it to one's own awareness. *Tat* negates the individually limited subjective awareness of *tvam* by indicating its identity as undifferentiated existence. When they are identified they make a single partless meaning (*akhaṇḍārtha*), [358] which reveals one's self-identity as none other than *brahman* by negating self-ignorance in the form of false self-superimpositions.[359] These two meanings are then equated as *brahman* and identified as one's self. The equation is the key to the means of self-knowledge. Discriminating the self as awareness is arguably possible

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[356] US 18.195.
[357] US 18.170,18.196-7.
[358] Ānandagiri's commentary on US 18.173.
[359] US 18.173.

without the Upaniṣads, however, it only leads to the witness. The equation of identity is necessary to understand that awareness as undifferentiated existence.

Śaṅkara understands the method of *anvaya* and *vyatireka* as the intrinsic method of the *śruti* and is adamant that properly understanding *māhavākyas* such as *tat tvam asi* are the only means to liberation. Nothing else needs to be done. He often illustrates and the power of sentences such as *tat tvam asi* to reveal one's immediately available self with the story of the tenth man. Ten boys are traveling from one village to another. After traversing a river they line up on the riverbank to check if all have safely crossed. Each one counts but finds only nine boys, and they sorrowfully conclude that one boy has drowned in the river. An old wise man then walks by and noticing their forlorn expressions, enquires about their problem. Upon hearing their plight he tells them to line up again and asks the eldest boy to count the others. When the boy reaches nine the old man points at him and says "You are the tenth." Through this statement the boy has the immediate knowledge that he is the missing tenth boy. He simply forgot to count himself.[360] This sentence uses *anvaya/vyatireka* to solve the situation by stripping away false identities of the boy and the missing tenth and then equating them as the boy's very self. The indicative statement possesses this capacity to give immediate knowledge because the boy's self is immediately evident to himself and because there is no real

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360 *avidyābaddhacakṣuṣṭvāt kāmāpahṛtadhīḥ sadā* |
viviktaṃ dṛśimātmānaṃ nekṣate daśamaṃ yathā || US 18.175
Just as the tenth man (did not know himself) so too he does not see the separate *ātman*, who is the seer because his eyes are blocked by ignorance and his intellect is always pulled by desires. (US 18.175)

problem to solve other than an ignorant mistake. The tenth boy does not need to engage any additional action or produce any new experience to become the tenth.[361]

3.4.3: Secondary Implication (*lakṣaṇā*)

The third method is secondary implication (*lakṣaṇā*). *Lakṣaṇā* became the preferred method and terminology among later advaitins, though it is closely based on Śaṅkara's *anvaya/vyatireka*.[362] Śankara himself rarely uses the term,[363] but the methodology that later Advaitins describe is clearly evident in Śaṅkara's writing, even if not systematically categorized. The following section exemplifies the use of *lakṣaṇā* through Śaṅkara's commentary on the sentence s*atyaṁ jñānam anantaṁ brahma*, "*brahman* is truth, knowledge, infinite" in TU 2.1.1. Śaṅkara states that this sentence is meant as a definition of *brahman*; however, if *brahman* is infinite and indescribable, then is a sentence declaring its nature self-defeating? How can language directly designate the reality of *brahman*? Śaṅkara's extended exegesis of this sentence resolves this apparent contradiction through the method of implication.

Śaṅkara begins his analysis of *satyaṁ jñānam anantaṁ brahma* with a discussion of grammatical apposition (co-referentiality), or "being in the same case" (*sāmānādhikaraṇya*).[364] Each word in the sentence has the same case ending: singular,

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361 Śaṅkara also mentions the tenth man in US 12.3, 18.172, 18.174-6, 18.192-3; BUbh 1.4.7 and TU 2.1. A similar parable is the story of the lost prince who grows up as a hunter. He mistakenly thinks he is a hunter until a compassionate man informs him he is truly a prince. See BUbh 2.1.20. For another brief but important summary of *tattvamasi*, see BSbh 4.1.2.

362 This may have begun with Padmapāda, though I am not sure. Sureśvara places a heavy focus on *anvaya* and *vyatireka* throughout his writing. In fact, I would argue that his emphasis on this method is the defining characteristic of his understanding of Śaṅkara's method.

363 See Comans 2000, pp. 291-299 for some exceptions such as US 18.29 and KeUbh 2.4.

364 As he also does in *tat tvam asi*.

neuter, and nominative and refer to a single referent. According to Śaṅkara, we have to decide here which word is the substantive and which are the attributes. Śaṅkara explains that due to the context of the previous sentence, *brahmavid āpnoti param* (the knower of *brahman* obtains the highest) where *brahman* is the object of knowledge, *brahman* must also be the substantive element in *satyam jñānam anantam brahma*.

For Indian grammarians, the adjectives (*viśeṣaṇāni*) in a sentence generally provide the function of qualifying the substantive. The subject-predicate construction denotes the relationship of an attribute and its possessor. However Śaṅkara objects to this understanding in his interpretation of *satyam jñānam anantam brahma*, and differentiates the purpose of the adjectives as defining rather than qualifying.[365] The difference is between a qualification that distinguishes the substantive from other objects in its class (*jāti*) and a definition that distinguishes the object from all other objects.

We can distinguish two types of definition (*lakṣaṇa*). The first is more aptly termed a characterization because it identifies a characteristic mark to differentiate a thing from other things.[366] A second type of definition uses the universal, or class character, to show the ground for the use of a word. For example, we can define a cow as that which possesses cowhood. This latter type of definition can be termed a philosophic or real definition.[367] As we will see, Śaṅkara employs a third type of definition for defining *brahman*, which is similar to characterization for it depends on exclusion.

See Comans 1996, fn. 45 for Kaiyata's definition of this in his commentary upon the *Mahābhāṣya*.

[365] *yasmāllakṣaṇārthpradhānāni viśeṣaṇāni naviśeṣaṇapradhānānyeva*

[366] Phillips 1997, p. 63.

[367] Phillips 1997, p. 63.

However, rather then focusing on defining by attributes he defines *brahman* by focusing on its essential nature (*svarūpalakṣaṇa*).

Śaṅkara argues that the words in the sentence cannot be attributes of *brahman* because *brahman* does not belong to any class. There is no need to differentiate *brahman* from other *brahman*s, for only one *brahman* exists. Instead, the words serve to define *brahman* by distinguishing *brahman* from all objects.[368]

Śaṅkara uses the common example of a lily to explain qualification. In the sentence "The big blue fragrant lily" the word "blue" is not meant to distinguish the lily from another class/species of objects, but only from other lilies in the lily species (*svajāti viśeṣaṇa*). Śaṅkara does not clearly make the use-mention distinction, the differentiation of metalanguage and object language, though this distinction was clearly made by early grammarians.[369] Usually words are used to point to the objects they refer to, but words can also be used to mention themselves.[370] In this context Śaṅkara is primarily referring to the word "blue" rather then the quality blue. However, this distinction may be difficult for Śaṅkara to make because according to Advaita theory the word is eternally linked to its referent. The word "blue" negates other *viśeṣaṇas* such as pink or white, and thus negates any lily that is not blue. This type of relationship between substantive and adjective (*viśeṣyaviśeṣaṇasambandha*) is necessary when there is more than one object in a given *jāti*, but unnecessary when the *jāti* consists of only one member.

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368 Śaṅkara gives space as an example of a definition. Space is that which accommodates. *yathāvakāśapradātrākāśamiti*.

369 Pāṇini, in his *Aṣṭādhyāyī,* makes the distinction in the *sūtra,* "*svaṃ rūpaṃ śabdasyāśabdasaṃjñā*" 1.1.68. See Matilal 1990, pp. 7-8.

Grammatically, a definition (*lakṣaṇa*) acts as a *viśeṣaṇa* to the subject, however, rather then distinguishing the noun from things in its own class it marks the object from everything else. Thus, unlike an adjective, a definition distinguishes the object from other objects in the same class (*sajāti*) as well as dissimilar objects (*vijāti*). One may argue that even when a species consists of many or only one member, as in the case of *brahman*, a definition can still use adjectives to qualify the object. For example, we can define a cow as that which possesses a dewlap. Only cows possess dewlaps so the sentence acts as a definition. The dewlap is a defining or characteristic mark (*lakṣaṇa*) of what is to be defined (*lakṣya*), a cow. It is perceivable and forms only a part of the cow.

Śaṅkara faces a difficult problem. One cannot define *brahman* in the same way a cow is defined. If *brahman* is non-dual how can one posit a characterizing mark, for, characterizing marks can only exist in duality. One cannot perceive *satyam* sticking to *brahman* like a dewlap to a cow. Otherwise *brahman* becomes a substance in the world (*dharmin*) possessing attributes (*guṇas*), a position which Śaṅkara finds untenable both according to logic and the Upaniṣads. Furthermore, as pure awareness, *brahman* is the ground and content of the subjective experience that lies at the core of a person and is the witness of the mind. As self-luminous consciousness, *brahman* is immediately evident as the real subject but cannot itself become an object of perception like a dewlap. The Advaitin's argument appears to leave the reader in a conundrum. How is it possible to define *brahman*? Either *brahman* is non-existent or it is an unintelligible paradox, so why bother attempting to understand the sentence?

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[370] See Martinich 2001, pp. 3-6.

In fact, I believe Śaṅkara wants the student to encounter the problem of definition because it naturally leads to the fundamental method necessary to interpret such sentences and gives the essential definition (*svarūpalakṣaṇa*) of *brahman*, namely, secondary indication (*lakṣaṇā*).[371] According to Advaita, words have literal denotative meanings (*mukhyārtha* or *vācyārtha*) as well as implied connotative meanings (*lakṣyārtha*). In certain situations the secondary implied meaning is the actual referent of the word. There is some relationship between the literal and implied meaning, and the implied sense is taken when the intention of the primary meaning is somehow blocked by the sentence.[372]

Advaita distinguish three forms of *lakṣaṇā*.[373] The first is *jahallakṣaṇā*, where the primary meaning is completely discarded and the implied meaning is taken. The stock example is "the village on the Ganga". The primary meaning of the sentence is impossible because it is not suitable for the context. A village cannot exist on the river itself. Instead, the primary meaning is dropped, and the secondary meaning of the "bank" connected to "Ganga" is supplied. The actual sense of the sentence, the secondary meaning, comes to the hearer's mind after recognizing the incompatibility of the sentence

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[371] This definition of *lakṣaṇā* differs from its translations as a "definition" of "indicating mark" (*lakṣaṇam*).
[372] See Madhavananda's translation (1993) of *Vedāntaparibhāṣā,* p. 102.
Though I hesitate to use the terms denotative and connotative. The secondary meaning used in Advaita's *jahalajahallakṣaṇā* is part of the direct reference of the word unlike the other two forms of it. *Lakṣaṇā* is not pulling in a new meaning, as in the case of suggestion (*dhvani*), but negating aspects to reduce the word meaning to the most basic aspect of the referent.
[373] Śaṅkara does not give a direct explanation of *lakṣaṇā,* though it is clear he depended on the concept. Later Advaita texts such as Dharmarāja's *Vedāntaparibhāṣa* give systematic explanations of *lakṣaṇā*.

with the primary meaning. In this case the relationship between the primary meaning of "Ganga" and the secondary meaning is one of proximity.[374]

A second form of *lakṣaṇā* is *ajahallakṣaṇā*, where the primary meaning is retained and an implied meaning is added along with it. In the statement "The lances enter" it is obvious that lances lack the capacity of mobility. Through *ajahallakṣaṇā* we know that people enter along with lances. Another common example is "Protect the curds from the crows", where not only should one protect the curds from crows but anything else which tries to eat it.

The third form of *lakṣaṇā, jahadajahallakṣaṇā* (or *bhāgatyāgalakṣaṇā*), is integral for Śaṅkara's exegesis. In this type of indication, a portion of the primary meaning is rejected while another part is retained. For example, the statement "The village is burnt" does not refer to the entire village but only a few homes within the village. The prominent Advaita example is "This (person that you see now) is that Devadatta (who you knew in the past)" (*so 'yam devadattaḥ*).[375] Here, the primary referents of "this" and "that" cannot be identical because "this" and "that" refer to different locations and times, Devadatta in the past somewhere else and Devadatta here and now. The two Devadattas are not completely identical because of the relationships to time and place, nor are there two completely separate Devadattas. The import of the sentence creates a cognition of a single Devadatta substantive that is not connected to a

[374] Kunjunni Raja 2000, pp. 249-250.
[375] See Kunjunni Raja 2000, pp. 251-254.

specific time or place. This form of *lakṣaṇā* is employed in understanding "*satyam jñānam anantam brahma*"and clearly parallels Śaṅkara's explanation of *tat tvam asi*.[376]

Śaṅkara defines *satyam* as that which "does not change the nature that is ascertained to be its own; and a thing is said to be unreal when it changes the nature that is ascertained to be its own".[377] Śaṅkara claims the primary distinction between what is real or not real is change. For example, when one mistakes a rope for a snake, the imagined snake is negated by knowledge. The snake name and form changes, but its substratum and reality, the rope maintains its nature before and after the existence of the snake. This example is limited, for the rope also changes. At one time it was simply unbraided fibers and eventually it will disintegrate and lose its rope nature. However, even then pure existence remains as its reality. Just as a lump of clay takes different shapes as a pot or a plate, the clay remains as the reality of the forms. So too is *brahman* the unchanging existence that stays constant through all objects and all change. The clay example also demonstrates Śaṅkara's view that a property such as shape (pot, lump, plate) is not as real as the substance clay. The properties depend on the substance for their existence but the substance exists independently of the properties.[378]

The definition of *brahman* as *satyam* is incomplete, for certain doubts remain. If *brahman* is the reality or substratum of all objects like the clay is to the pot, is *brahman* inert like the clay? Does *brahman*, while retaining its nature as *brahman*, undergo

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[376] Śaṅkara cites this sentence as explaining the same content as *tat tvam asi* in BSbh 4.1.2.
[377] *satyamiti yadrūpeṇa yanniścitaṃ tadrūpam na vyabhicarati tatsatyam* | *yadrūpeṇa niścitaṃ yattadrūpaṃ vyabhicarad anṛtam ity ucyate* | TUbh 2.1.1 (my translation).

changes by becoming objects in the world? If so, Śaṅkara's definition of *satyam* would be compromised. In order to negate aspects of the primary denotation of *satyam* such as inertness and change, which are incompatible with *brahman*, Śaṅkara brings in *jñānam* and *anantam*. If *brahman* is also *jñānam* (knowledge/consciousness) then it must not possess the aspect of inertness that something *satyam* may seem to have. However, *jñānam* generally refers to mental cognition or the agent of knowledge. This naturally leads one to assume *brahman* is the agent and creator of the world. But then *brahman* is still subject to change, for any agent is within time and changes.

Śaṅkara's issue with agency points to his refutation of defining *brahman* as the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the universe. According to him, not only does this fail to define *brahman* and reveal its *svarūpa*, but also makes *brahman* subject to change and therefore finite. Vedic sentences pointing to agency are not *svarūpalakṣaṇa* but *tatasthalakṣaṇa* (accidental definition). They indicate *brahman* by pointing to a non-intrinsic attribute. This attribute does not inherently exist with the object at all times, but can still distinguish it from other things. For example, one may say, "The house you are looking for is the one with a crow perched on it". The crow is not intrinsic to the house so it is simply *tatasthalakṣaṇa*. Similarly sentences pointing to agency for *brahman* do not refer to *brahman's* true nature, but are helpful in pointing us in the right direction.[379] Agency is negated by the word *anantam* (infinite). Śaṅkara writes,

[378] Śaṅkara's discusses the clay in CUbh 6.1.4, "…as by knowing a lump of clay, all things made of clay are known."

[379] See Bhattacharya 2000, p. 27-8 for Sarvajñātman's explanation of *svarūpa* and *tatasthalakṣaṇam*.

> If it be the agent of knowing, It becomes delimited by the knowable and knowledge, and hence there cannot be infinitude, in accordance with another Vedic text: 'The Infinite is that where one does not understand anything else. Hence, the finite is that where one understands something else' (Ch.Bh. 7.24.1)[380]

Anantam negates any end or limitation for *brahman*. It cannot be an object, for all objects are spatially limited, yet all objects must be included within *brahman*. To exclude anything from *brahman* would place a limit on it, contradicting its nature as *anantam*. All objects are *brahman*, but *brahman* is not any object. *Anantam* also negates any limitation of time on *brahman*. *Brahman* is the reality of time and is not subject to temporal limits. *Anantam* provides an essential counter to the problematic aspects of *satyam* and *jñānam*. It breaks the finite agency of *jñānam* and removes *satyam* from its association with finite objects.

In the sentence, "*jñānam*" does not refer to the common sense of the word such as cognition or mind, but rather to the abstract meaning of the verbal root (*jñaptiḥ*).[381] As pure awareness, which is unchanging (*satyam*) and infinite (*anantam*) it is neither the finite knower or known object, nor an inert object, or something that exists within the relationship of cause and effect. *Jñānam*, as the essential nature of *brahman*, is not dependent on anything else for its existence (*svataḥ siddhaḥ*) and is the nature of self-illuminating (*svaprakāśaḥ*) awareness. *Jñānam* is the invariable aspect that underlies the action of knowing without ever changing. It is the immediate reality of all subjective experience. According to Advaita, cognition, and objects of cognition constantly

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[380] Gambhirananda 1995, p. 309.

[381] *jñānam jñaptiravabodhaḥ, bhāvasādhano jñānaśabdo na tu jñānakartṛ brahmaviśeṣaṇatvāt satyānantābhyāṃ saha* (p.104).

undergo change, but consciousness itself remains the same. It is the invariable *satyam* of the knower.

Śaṅkara explains that the sentence functions as a means to discard all commonly construed associations with the words while retaining their fundamental meaning. He summarizes this in the following statement,

> Thus the words 'truth' etc., occurring in mutual proximity, and restricting and being restricted in turns by each other, distinguish *brahman* from other objects denoted by the words, 'truth' etc., and thus become fit for defining it as well (TUBh. 2.1.l).[382]

Through the sentence, time (*kāla*), space (*deśa*), name and form (*nāmarūpa*), limiting properties (*upādhi*), inertness (*jaḍatvam*), change (*vyabhicāra*), and any finiteness (*antatvam*) are all discarded. Any distinction or qualification attributed to *brahman* must be false. Only unchanging infinite existence and infinite consciousness exist, and nothing is left to separate them if they are beyond the limitations of time and space. Existence and consciousness are one and the same non dual *brahman*. In Śaṅkara's Advaita these three words, *satyam, jñānam,* and *anantam* indicate *brahman* by defining its essential nature.

3.4.4: One Method, Different Names

Parallels between *neti neti*, *anvaya*/*vyatireka*, and *lakṣanā* are apparent. These are all in fact part and parcel of one exegetical method. All these methods strip away all qualities, attributes, identities, concepts, and anything associated with space and time from one's self-identity, so that only non-dual self-evident awareness-existence is left as

[382] Gambhirananda 1995, p.315.

one's self. They all directly reveal the *ātman* by indirectly communicating its true immediate nature. I believe the similarity of *anvaya/vyatireka* and *lakṣaṇā* in particular are quite evident and that they constitute the same method.[383] Both *lakṣaṇā* and *anvaya/vyatireka* are used for *māhavākya* identity statements that form an equation consisting of two or more co-referential terms. In all these cases a lack of logical congruence prods the reader to use a hermeneutical method to resolve the equation. Both methods come in and function to restrict and indicate the meaning of the sentence by juxtaposing the words. They set the conditions for discriminating insight into what is the self and not-self by negating adventitious properties and identities, and finally equate the true underlying references of the terms into one entity, namely *brahman*.

Negative language is slightly different than the other two in appearance, but is indeed functioning through the same method. Śaṅkara clearly equates *neti neti* and *anvaya/vyatireka* in the US.[384] *Lakṣaṇā* and *anvaya/vyatireka* inherently depend on a process of negation (*neti neti*) through their mutual restriction; however, negative

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[383] The post-Śaṅkara Advaita tradition favored the terminology of *lakṣaṇā* over *anvaya* and *vyatireka*. This has led to some disagreement among scholars. Cardona 1981, pp. 94-6 and Comans 2000, pp. 289-291 argue that *lakṣaṇā* and *anvayva/vyatireka* are the same method. Others, such as Mayeda 1992, p. 55 interpret *lakṣaṇā* as different than *anvaya* and *vyatireka*. He writes that later Advaitins dropped *anvaya* and *vyatireka* in favor of *lakṣaṇā*. I believe that the methods are not different; however, I am not clear why *lakṣaṇā* became the favored terminology and classification for later Advaitins. Mayeda reasons that there is a defect in Śaṅkara's use of *anvaya* and *vyatireka* (referring to his example of "the black horse" not fitting *lakṣaṇā)*, though Madeya's critique of this statement is weak because it only demonstrates *sāmānādhikaraṇyam*. Later Advaitins may have wanted to avoid terms borrowed from grammar and Nyāya. It is also important to remember that Śaṅkara was not wedded to consistent use of terms and later Advaitins may not have felt any pressure to use the exact terms that Śaṅkara uses.
Of special note is US 18.29-31, which uses the verb *lakṣayeyuḥ* in the context of words indirectly expressing the self. This verse occurs in the wider discussion of *anvaya* and *vyatireka* and shows that *neti neti* functions like *lakṣaṇā*.

[384] Śaṅkara clearly equates *neti neti* with *anvaya* and *vyatireka*. See US 18.195, and 18.198. Earlier in the same chapter he shows that *neti neti* functions like *lakṣanā* (US 18.21, 18.29-31). Also see Śaṅkara's commentary on GK 3.26.

language appears to be only half of the *lakṣanā* and *anvaya/vyatireka* processes because it lacks any explicit positive proposition of continuity. *Lakṣaṇā* is not a purely negative process, for it restricts meaning while simultaneously asserting the positive nature of *brahman*. However, Śaṅkara does not view negative language as purely apophatic, for apparently, this would lead him to a position of nihilism where reality is absolutely none existent.[385] Negative language functions to negate anything remote or indirect from the individual, anything which is superimposed on the self and which can become an object of the mind. It thus is supposed to break any mental grasping of an objectifiable conceptual referent. He still assumes the presence of pure awareness and existence as a kind of referent underlying the negation of *neti neti*. Pure awareness persists through the negation process for one cannot deny one's own existence. The awareness and pure existence that remains somehow referred through and after the negation does not have to be directly referred to because it is supposedly self-evident and any direct reference to it would have to be false.[386]

Neti neti as a soteriological method appears different from *anvaya/vyatireka* and *lakṣaṇā* in other ways. It is not drawn from a particular *mahāvākya*, and thus is not dealing with an identity sentence or the lack of *yogyatā* in such sentences. One may

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[385] Śaṅkara's *brahman* is not a complete void (*śūnyatā*) similar to the Buddhist position of Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika position (though it is also debatable whether Nagarjuna's emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is truly absolute non-existence). Many later critics of Śaṅkara claimed he was a Buddhist in disguise or a crypto-Buddhist (*pracannabauddha*) because *brahman* appears dangerously close to a complete void, but this is a false accusation because there is an indirect assertion of *brahman's* existence. *Lakṣaṇā* would not be possible if its intention was to indicate a non-existent entity or absolute emptiness. Śaṅkara gives an excellent and lengthy explanation of this aspect of *neti neti* in BSbh 3.2.22

[386] Though in BU 2.3.6 the text does directly state *brahman* as "something other than this which is beyond."

assume that we do not find grammatical *anvaya* in negation itself or the passage in which it occurs, but we do find it in the larger context surrounding the passage. For example, the immediate verses preceding *neti neti* in BU 2.3.6 speak of *brahman* as the subtle and gross bodies. They are then negated, yet *brahman* still remains as the "real of the real" (or "truth of truth" – *satyasya satyam*). Similarly in 4.5.15, the negation (almost verbatim to 2.3.6) is preceded by a discussion indirectly pointing to the meaning of *tvam*. Yājñavalkya describes the witness perceiver as unperceivable. It is the absolute essence and source of all things yet it is also beyond duality and a pure mass of undifferentiated awareness without interior or exterior. One cannot "know" this source, the knower behind the knower, but it is indirectly indicated through negation. In these examples we find that in the larger context there is a superimposition of *brahman* which is progressively negated so that only awareness remains as meant.[387] The larger discussion functions like a dilated *māhavākya*. The method of resolution in the form of negation is then directly stated as a means to resolve the situation and point to *brahman*.

[387] *Lakṣaṇā* and *anvaya/vyatireka* do not directly state a superimposition and then negate it, but superimposition is already presupposed in the literal meaning of the terms in the sentence. It may be more precise to label this process as superimposition (*adhyāropa*) and de-superimposition (*apavāda*). The context brings our attention to superimpositions of self-identity and the *neti neti* then removes those superimpositions. *Adhyāropa* and *apavāda* is fundamentally the same as *anvaya* and *vyatireka*. In BUbh 4.4.25 Śaṅkara writes that, in a nutshell, the intention of the Upaniṣads is *adhyāropa* and *apavāda* (*apoha*) and discusses de-superimposition as *neti neti*. A good example Śaṅkara identifies as *adhyāropa* and *apavāda* is BG 13.13, which describes *brahman* as having hands and feet everywhere, etc. This has *brahman* as all pervasive in all limiting adjuncts, yet the prior negation in BG 13.12 and the subsequent negation in BG 13.14 deny adjuncts as a limitation on *brahman*.

Chapter 4: The Method of *nididhyāsana*

4.1: Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.4.5: The Root Text for *nididhyāsana*

Śaṅkara only occasionally mentions *nididhyāsana* specifically by name and does not employ other terms for contemplation with regularity, but rather uses the terms he meets with in the root text he commentates upon. However, he often implicitly includes *nididhyāsana* within the expression "*śravaṇādi*" (hearing, etc.). It is intriguing to note that he does not mention *nididhyāsana* in his one accepted independent work, the *Upadeśasāhasrī*, despite the length of the text. However, in the US he spends an entire chapter on the *parisaṅkhyāna* contemplation, which I believe is the same thing as *nididhyāsana*. Śaṅkara uses a number of other terms for contemplation in his writing such as *āvṛtti* (repetition),[388] *smṛti sant āna* or *smṛti santati* (continuous flow of memory),[389] *ātmācintā* (thinking of the self) [390] *dhyāna yoga* (*yoga* of meditation/contemplation),[391] or simply meditation/contemplation (*dhyānam*)[392], *brahmayoga* (*yoga* of *brahman*),[393] *adhyātma yoga* (*yoga* of the self), [394] *manonigraha* (restraining the mind)[395] *jnana abhyāsa* (practice/repetition of knowledge) or *abhyāsa*

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388 BS 4.1.1.
389 BU 1.4.7, 1.4.10.
390 BU. 1.4.7.
391 BG Ch. 6, 18.52
392 BG 13.24, KU 2.2.1, US 13.17.
393 BG 5.21.
394 KU 1.2.12.
395 GKbh 3.41-2. Though it is debatable whether restraining the mind refers to contemplation or meditation in this context, and whether there is self-knowledge available in manonigraḥ. In some places Śaṅkara says that knowledge is present. For example, in GK 3.34 he writes, "And the behavior of the mind under control is surely different, since ignorance, the seed of evil activities, has been burn away from that

yoga,[396] *anusmarana* (remembering),[397] *anucintaṇa* (thinking over),[398] *adhyātma-jñāna-nityatva* (always contemplating self-knowledge),[399] *upāsana* or *paryupāsanā*,[400] *ananya bhakti* (unwavering devotion),[401]*saṁrādhana* (absorbed contemplation),[402] *samādhi* (deep contemplation),[403] and *parisaṅkhyāna* (repeated contemplation).[404]

Evidently Śaṅkara was not concerned with using a unique term for the contemplative process and prefers, as I have said, to follow whatever terms he finds in texts he commentates on. However, post-Śaṅkara Advaitins desired to make Advaita more systematic with more clearly defined terms. Subsequently, *nididhyāsana*, along with *śravaṇa* and *manana*, crystallized as terms used for a threefold process. This choice was not random though, for Śaṅkara clearly placed great importance on the root text, BU 2.4.5, which indicates the triple process and often talks about the threefold process as the quintessential Advaita practice(s) leading to liberation.

There are a number of key verses in the Upaniṣads that Śaṅkara takes as referring to contemplation;[405] however, there is only one specifically for the term *nididhyāsana*. The root passage for the three-fold process of *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* occurs

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mind by the fire of the realization of the truth that is the self, and since from that mind has been removed the blemish of all afflictions" (Gambhirananda 1992, p. 307).

[396]BG 6.35, 8.8, 12.9. See Gkbh 3.31 for *viveka-darśana-abhyāsa*, a phrase similarly used in YSbh 1.12.

[397] BG 8.9, GKbh 3.43.

[398] BG 8.8.

[399] BG 13.11.

[400] BUbh 1.4.7, BG 12.3.

[401] BG 13.10, though this is *ananya-yogena-bhakti*.

[402] BS 3.2.24.

[403] GKbh 3.37, BGbh 6.19. Śaṅkara often uses the related term *samāhita*, a synonym for *yukta*, in the BGbh as a description of the *yogī* engaged in contemplation. For example, see BGbh 6.18.

[404] US prose chapter three.

I've only found one reference to *bhāvanā* (*ātmādhibhāvanā*) in BGbh 13.10.

in the Yājñavalkya and Maitreyī dialogue in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.5, and is repeated almost verbatim in BU 4.5.6. These two *mantras* are the only two passages in the Upaniṣad corpus that specifically mention the triple process and *nididhyāsana*.[406] Śaṅkara introduces this *brāhmaṇa* by continuing his preceding discussion distinguishing the domains of knowledge and ritual action. He believes the thrust of the narrative is to enjoin renunciation and reiterates that ritual is based in ignorance and dependent on divisions, names, forms, and actions, which are all incompatible with recognizing non-duality. This incompatibility necessitates the renunciation of ritual and other activities that do not lead to self-knowledge. He also reiterates that actions, rituals, and qualifications for rituals, which are usually prescribed as one's duties according to stage of life and caste (*varṇāśrama dharma*), are pointless for one possessing self-knowledge.

The context of BU. 2.4 is a dialogue between Yājñavalkya and one of his wives, Maitreyī. Yājñavalkya chooses to leave the householder life and embark on a life of renunciation, and thus intends to divide his wealth between Maitreyī and his other wife Kātyāyanī.[407] Maitrey ī, possessing a discriminative intellect, inquires if she will gain immortality by having his and indeed all the worlds' wealth. When Yājñavalkya denies

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405 Such as BU 1.4.7, BU 1.4.10, BU 1.4.15, BU 3.5.1, BU 4.4.21, and CU 8.7.1,

406 Śaṅkara held the BU in high esteem, and his commentary on it is only second to his commentary on the BS in terms of maturity, length, and complexity. He also quotes heavily from the BU in both the BSbh and the US. According to Mayeda (1965 pp. 187-8), the BU was the most important source for Śaṅkara. He quotes passages from the BU more than the CU in the US. In the BSbh he quotes more from the BU, but the BS text itself cites the BU more often than the CU., and even then the ratio of *bhāṣyam* quotes is higher for BU compared to the citations in the *sūtra*s themselves.

407 Yājñavalkya says he will depart from this place (*aham asmāt sthānād asmi*). It is debatable whether any formal path of renunciation existed at the time of the BU's composition and therefore it is unclear what "*sthānāt*" means. It is perhaps anachronistic to identify it with an *āśrama*. Whether it was formal *saṁnyāsa*, simply leaving home, or even referring to death is unclear. I am following Śaṅkara's interpretation of the passage as renunciation, whatever precisely this was for him.

any possibility of immortality through wealth, Maitreyī requests that he explain the means to immortality. Yājñavalkya replies:

> One holds a husband dear, you see, not out of love for the husband; rather, it is out of love for oneself (*ātman*) that one holds a husband dear. One holds a wife dear not out of love for the wife; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds a wife dear. One holds children dear not out of love for the children; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds children dear. One holds wealth dear not out of love for wealth; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds wealth dear. One holds the priestly power dear not out of love for the priestly power; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds the priestly power dear. One holds the royal power dear not out of love for the royal power; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds the royal power dear. One holds the worlds dear not out of love for the worlds; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds the worlds dear. One holds the gods dear not out of love for the gods; rather, it out of love for oneself that one holds the gods dear. One holds beings dear not out of love for beings; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds beings dear. One holds the Whole dear not out of love for the Whole; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds the Whole dear.[408]

Yājñavalkya teaches a central insight into the reality and our misconceptions of desires. He critiques some of the most sought-after objects that are considered sources of joy, and it is not incidental that many of these objects are closely tied to ritual action as well.[409] In fact, one of the underlying motives of this passage seems to be to denigrate desires along with results that impel ritual and conventional actions. The central idea in this passage is that the self is the innermost entity in comparison to sons, wealth, or heavenly worlds. The self is the most intimate aspect of our existence and experience. When we desire or love objects, it is not for the sake of the object but primarily for the

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[408] Olivelle 1996, pp. 28-29.

[409] This verse parallels and gives further commentary on BU. 1.4.8. BU 1.4.8 and 1.4.7 are similar to BU 2.4.5 though the order is reversed. 1.4.7 says the self should be meditated upon (i.e. known) and explains that the self is most dear in 1.4.8.

love of our selves. Yājñavalkya then proceeds to speak the root text for *nididhyāsana* as the means to understand the *ātman*.

> Oh Maitreyī, the self should be seen, should be heard, should be reflected on, and contemplated upon. By seeing, listening, reflecting, and contemplating, all this is known.[410]

Śaṅkara provides the following commentary on the passage:[411]

> Therefore, *the self, my dear should be seen* – deserves to be seen, should be obtained as an object of seeing (knowing). *Should be heard* – first from the teacher and the Vedas. Then *it should be reflected upon* according to reasoning. *Then it should be contemplated* – it should be contemplated on with certainty. Indeed, in this way, by the performance of listening, reflecting, and contemplating, it (the self) is known. When these (three) are approached (combined) as one, then correct understanding of the oneness of *brahman* becomes clear, not otherwise by listening alone.[412]

Despite the importance of the Upaniṣad, why should this single laconic passage, repeated again in 4.5.6, identify and solidify the triple process as the means to understanding non-duality? Śaṅkara certainly does maintain the triple process as the key to *brahmavidyā* and discusses it in a few places, but he does not elaborate on it or make an effort to defend it against other possibilities. The triple process derived from this passage was evidently already an established soteriological method by Śaṅkara's time,

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[410] *ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotravyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo maitreyi*
ātmano vā are darśanena śravaṇena matyā vijñānenedaṁ sarvaṁ viditam | (my translation).
The last line of 4.5.6 is slightly different and reads *ātmani khalv are dṛṣṭe śrute mate vijñāta idaṃ sarvaṁ viditam*.

[411] Italics refer to the source text.

[412] *tasmāt ātmā vai are draṣṭavyaḥ-darśanārhaḥ, darśanaviṣayam āpādayitavyaḥ; śrotavyaḥ -pūrvam ācāryata āgamataś ca; paścān mantavyaḥ tarkataḥ; tato nididhyāsitavyaḥ-niścayena dhātavyaḥ; evaṃ hy asau dṛṣṭo bhavati śravaṇamanananididhyāsanasādhanair nirvartitaiḥ; yadā ekatvam etāny upagatāni tadā samyagdarśanaṃ brahmaikatvaviṣayaṃ prasīdati, na anyathā śravaṇamātreṇa* |(my translation).

not only in Advaita but also probably in other Vedānta traditions.[413] He often refers to it in his writing, though usually in an abbreviated form, as "listening, etc." (*śravaṇādi*).[414] Śaṅkara may have been constrained to maintain the triple process due to its popularity, and reinterpret it as damage control against *karmajñānasamuccayavādin*s who wanted to enjoin meditation as a separate independent action leading to liberation. And apparently this verse may have been contested even at the time of the *Brahmasūtra*'s composition, for Śaṅkara interprets a few *sūtra*s as clarifying the meaning of BU 2.4.5. He provides an extensive discussion of this verse in BSbh 1.1.4 (*samanvaya adhikaraṇa*) and mentions it in BUbh 3.4.5. In BSbh 2.1.3 he mentions it as a type of *yoga*. At the end of BUbh 1.4.2 he says that *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* are the direct means to *brahman* and that other practices just remove obstacles.[415]

Śaṅkara draws out the triple process from the *mantra* despite the fact that the text does not demand high interpretation because there are four grammatically parallel words, not three, in each line. The related terms *draṣṭavyaḥ* (should be seen) and *darśanena* (be seeing) occur in the same case and verbal suffix as the other three in their respective sentences, potentially leading to a four-fold method. However, Śaṅkara separates *draṣṭavyah* and *darśanena* from the other three because "seeing" (*darśana*) denotes self-

[413] For example, in BUbh. 2.5.1 Śaṅkara refutes Bhartraprapañca's idea of identifying sections of the text with each part of the triple process. Some form of the triple process was common to many ancient Indian traditions. For example, see Nyāyasūtra bhāṣya 4.2.38. In the Theravādin Buddhist's *Dīgha Nikāya* we find a description of three kinds of knowledges, knowledge by thinking, knowledge by hearing, and knowledge by meditation: *cintāmayā paccā sutamayā puccā bhāvanāmayā paccā* (Carpenter 1960, p. 219).
[414] For example, see BSbh 1.1.4, 3.2.21, 4.1.1, US 18.203-5, US 18.210,213, BU 3.5.1, and KU 1.2.20, and his introduction to IU.
[415] For further discussions see BSbh 1.4.19 and BSbh 4.1.1.

knowledge itself.[416] Listening, reflecting, and contemplating are then the means for *darśana*.[417]

Darśana draws attention to the Advaitin's confusion and ignorance and the necessity for a method to remove ignorance. Śaṅkara's interpretation makes sense as an exegetical strategy, particularly in light of Advaita's epistemology. *Darśana*, as knowledge, is better viewed as the goal identified with liberation rather than as part of the means. There is no separation between self-knowledge and liberation. Although it is not false to claim self-knowledge is the means to liberation, Śaṅkara prefers to identify self-knowledge and liberation.

Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is vast, but his remarks explaining the triple method and *nididhyāsana* in particular are pithy. He stresses the importance of the Vedas and a teacher in *śravaṇa* and explains *manana* as reflection done according to logic (*tarka*). *Tarka* here may specifically refer to the process of *anvaya* and *vyatireka*, or to the broader project of resolving any philosophical doubts regarding *brahman*. He simply defines *nididhyāsatavyaḥ* as "to be contemplated on with certainty" (*niścayena dhyātavyaḥ*). With words such as "first" (*pūrvam*), "afterwards" (*paścāt*), and "then" (*tato*) Śaṅkara appears to say that there is a chronological process to the triple method.[418] He further states that all three are to be combined as one so that there is a

[416] *Darśana* literally refers to bodily seeing, but in this context refers to spiritual knowledge. It is common practice for Indian philosophical systems to use this term for knowledge; hence, the term *darśana* is itself used to denote a philosophical system.
[417] See Hirst 1996, p. 62 for more discussion of this.
[418] Though this does not necessarily mean that *śravaṇa* and *manana* are preliminary steps that lead to *nididhyāsana*, or are incapable by themselves of leading to *brahman* recognition, for in other places

unity of method. The use of "unity" (*ekatvam*) may indicate that there is only one underlying method that connects all three. Or it may indicate that all three are used at the same time. Interestingly, in the same sentence, *ekatvam* is repeated as a reference to *brahman*. I am not clear if there is an intentional or coincidental use of *ekatvam* in both sentences, but perhaps we may read further into this. Śaṅkara may be intimating a unity of scriptural method that in the final act derives from the oneness of *brahman*.

Śaṅkara stresses the necessity of all three processes and specifically states that listening to the teacher and the Upaniṣads alone is not capable of accomplishing self-knowledge.[419] This is surprising and sounds somewhat contradictory, for in numerous passages Śaṅkara states that listening alone, or listening and reflection alone, gives knowledge.[420] We can reconcile this apparent contradiction by recalling that an analysis through *anvaya* and *vyatireka* is required for proper *śravaṇa*. It is easy to see the unity of *śravaṇa* and *manana* if we assume that "*tarka*" refers to *anvaya* and *vyatireka*. From this perspective, *manana* is a means for proper *śravaṇa*. If *śravaṇa* is not supported by *anvaya* and *vyatireka,* then the sentences cannot release their content. *Manana* may refer to other types of reasoning, but Śaṅkara is adamant that all reasoning should be based in

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śravaṇa alone is adequate. In this case he does say all are necessary, and not one itself is sufficient. This confusion may be reduced to an issue of *adhikāritvam*, which I will discuss further.

[419] Śaṅkara's states that the self cannot be known through much hearing in his commentaries on MU 3.2.3 and KU 1.2.23.

[420] BSbh 2.1.3 and CUbh 8.11. Also see Bader 1990, p. 93 fn. 36 and 37, and p. 66 fn. 5, Comans 1988, p. 77, and Comans 1993, p. 36 fn. 49 for various other references in Śaṅkara's commentaries.
On the other hand, see TUbh. I.11.2-4, "meditation has emancipation as its result. …Deliberation and *nididhyāsana* are well known to be different from the knowledge acquired through hearing." Elsewhere in BSbh 1.1.4, Śaṅkara writes, "Reflection and profound meditation (just like hearing) are meant for giving rise to immediate knowledge. If *brahman* had been known through some other source of knowledge and then used in some other act or meditation, then it could have become a part of an injunction. But that is not

the Upaniṣads, or should not contradict the authority of the Upaniṣads. He clearly states that independent or "dry" (*śuṣka*) reasoning is not part of the means for liberation.[421]

The phrase "not by listening alone" is not only referring to the necessity of *manana*, but also the necessity of *nididhyāsana*. Self-knowledge should be revealed to an Advaitin studying with a qualified teacher who properly employs the Upaniṣads, but sometimes listening to the Upaniṣads will raise more doubts and create deeper confusion. If one has not previously turned attention towards his or her self then this inward directional gaze and the Advaitic vision of non-duality may be disorienting. Reflecting on self-knowledge through correct reasoning in order to neutralize philosophical doubts should allow the Advaitin to recognize the *ātman*. There is nothing else to be done. But in spite of that, listening and reasoning are not enough. In this context Śaṅkara does not explain why they are not enough, but based on other passages we can assume that even if one has listened and is not confused there may be problematic *saṁskāras*, psychological dispositions whose content contradicts non-duality and obscures self-knowledge.

Nididhyāsana itself is a rather unusual word for the Upaniṣad to employ. It is the desiderative form of the verbal root *dhyai* (to meditate) reduplicated with the prefix *ni*.[422] Why does the Upaniṣad use the desiderative verb form with a prefix, which is more complex than the other two, *śrotavyaḥ* and *mantavyaḥ*? The Upaniṣad could have used an equally simple verb such as *dhyātavyaḥ*. Is Yājñavalkya setting *nididhyāsana* apart

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the case. For just like hearing, reflection and meditation are also meant for knowledge" (Gambhirananda 1996, p. 43).

421 See BSbh 2.1.6 and 2.1.11. Also see Halbfass 1983, pp. 27-84.
Also see my earlier section against inferential reasoning in chapter three.

from *śravaṇa* and *manana*? Or is this reading too much into the ussage? The main point of Śaṅkara's gloss, "to be contemplated on with certainty," is simply to point out the basic derivation of *nididhyāsana* and to interpret the prefix "*ni*" as certainty (*niścaya*). Considering the importance of this passage, it is frustrating to have such little explanation from Śaṅkara for it leaves many questions unanswered. It also makes it all the more important to survey the different potential translations of this brief gloss and their potential repercussions.

Śaṅkara's interpretation of *ni* is his own speculation. This prefix possesses numerous possible meanings. The term *niścaya* is itself ambiguous here. Hirst rightly points out the subtle changes in emphasis depending on how we translate the line *niścayena dhyātavyaḥ*.[423] Out of context this can simply read as "Pay attention" or "Concentrate (on what I say)," but in this context it is much more loaded. If translated as, "It should be steadfastly meditated upon," "It should be contemplated unswervingly," or "It should be contemplated resolutely," the emphasis shifts to the mind of the contemplator and the contemplator's ability to hold the mind concentrated in contemplation. *Niścaya* then refers to the focus and quality of the mind, leaning towards mental control and meditative practice or the strong intention of the individual, an intention also potentially implied by the desiderative reduplication. On the other hand, if translated as "It should be contemplated on with certainty" or "It should be contemplated as ascertained," the emphasis falls towards the knowledge content of contemplation and

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[422] The desiderative expresses the desire to do the action of the verb. In traditional Paṇinian grammatical terms, *nididhyāsana* is derived as *ni* + √*dhyai* + *san* + *lyuṭ*.

the requirement that the contemplation be in accordance with the Upaniṣads and with reason.[424]

I believe that Śaṅkara suggests both translations; however, the translation "It should be contemplated on with certainty," which focuses on the content may have more prominence here. The parallel word to *nididhyāsitavyah*, *vijñānena* (by knowledge), used in the second line instead of the expected *nididhyāsanena* (by contemplation) supports this interpretation. In the almost verbatim passage in BU 4.5.6 Śaṅkara does not even use the term *nididhyāsana* in his commentary and immediately labels it with its parallel word "known" (*vijñāte*) from the second line. He explains *vijñāte* as "ascertained as this and not otherwise."[425] Another important clue comes in BU 2.4.4, the previous verse, where Yājñalvakya uses the imperative *nididhyāsasva* when telling Maitreyī, "While I am explaining, may you contemplate my words."[426] In his commentary on this verse Śaṅkara glosses *nididhyāsasva* as "May you desire to contemplate with *niścaya* the sentences according to their meaning."[427] Here there is a specific emphasis on concentrating on the sentence meaning and understanding its purport.[428] From this verse we can assume that Yājñavalkya (i.e. the composers of the Upaniṣad), and by extension Śaṅkara due to his commentary, is underscoring the process of focusing on the sentence meaning as the basis for *nididhyāsana*. However, Śaṅkara's commentary on 2.4.4 also shows the

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423 Hirst 1996, p. 63.
424 Hirst 1996, p. 63.
425 *vijñāte – evam etat nānyatheti nirdhārite* | BSbh 4.5.6 (my translation).
426 *vyācakṣāṇasya tu me nididhyāsasveti* (my translation).
427 *nididhyāsasva vākyāni arthato niścayena dhyātum iccheti* (my translation).
428 Further evidence of this reading is found in BGbh 6.24, 6.27 and 18.4, where Śaṅkara uses *niścaya* to refer to certain knowledge.

importance of concentration. And the desiderative form of the verb expresses a strong desire or committed intention. The obvious meaning of Yājñavalkya's statement is simply that Maitreyī pay attention and listen carefully. Thus, both a concentrated mind that steadfastly contemplates as well as clearly ascertains the verbal content of the listening, to wit, the oneness of *ātman* and *brahman*, are implicit in Śaṅkara's definition of *nididhyāsana*. Concentration and ascertainment are evident in that concentration is necessary to maintain the flow of remembered knowledge without distraction, and of course the sentence meaning is the same as the content. In *nididhyāsana*, keeping the mind focused is only in the context of focusing on non-duality as the content of the *mahāvākya*.

The parallel use of *vijñānena* in BU 2.4.5 (and *vijñāte* in BU 4.5.6) for *nididhyāsitavyaḥ* in the second line is somewhat confusing. It obviously parallels *nididhyāsitavyaḥ* in the previous line, but why use the word "known" for contemplation? Does this mean the self is already known prior to *nididhyāsana* or simultaneously with *nididhyāsana*, or is *nididhyāsana* a means for that knowledge? In the context of BU 2.4.5 Śaṅkara clearly takes it as part of the triple means instrumental to direct spiritual knowledge (*darśana*). Therefore *nididhyāsana* appears to precede self-knowledge, as instrumental causes generally precede their effects. However, in BU 4.5.6 he appears to take it as knowledge itself, leading to the possibility that *nididhyāsana* is identified with *darśana* and the self.[429] However, it is not clear if *vijñāna*, translated "ascertainment", is

[429] His disciple, Sureśvara, also takes *nididhyāsana* as knowledge itself. Sureśvara appears to reduce the knowledge process to *śravaṇa* and *manana*, and to identify *nididhyāsana* as stable knowledge and

synonymous with *darśana*.[430] Perhaps we can assume that there is some difference; hence the use of two different terms in such close proximity. It is possible that Śaṅkara uses a term for knowledge to describe contemplation because it leads to knowledge, is closely identified with knowledge, or relies on knowledge.[431] The other possibility, as I will argue in the following chapters, is that there is *brahmavidyā* but a lack of stability in knowledge due to problematic psychological impression (*saṁskāra*s) for which *nididhyāsana* is necessary. Śaṅkara's indecision, coming in virtually identical passages forming the root text for *nididhyāsana*, is telling. The ambiguity subtly raises some interesting questions about the epistemological status of *nididhyāsana* and the chronology of textual study, *nididhyāsana*, and knowledge. A close study of the teaching of *nididhyāsana* reveals a number of epistemological conundrums regarding the way it functions, its chronology in the study process, whether it leads to a gradual process of clarity or to a sudden liberating recognition of *brahman*, and whether it is still necessary after such recognition. Yet Śaṅkara makes no attempt to take a particular position or address such questions, and leaves them open-ended in his commentary on this key passage.

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liberation (see Sureśvara on Yājñavalkya Maitreyī dialogue in Shoun Hino 1993, p. 187 and BU 4.4.21 in Potter 1981, though in some other places Sureśvara also accepts *nididhyāsana* as part of the means for the student who needs to resolve obstructions. See *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi* 3.125.

430 A similar issue can be read into *niścaya*, for in some contexts this is clearly used with reference to a liberated person like in BG 6.27. But in BU 2.4.5 one would assume it means part of the means leading to self-knowledge.

431 For example, see BGbh 13.1.

4.1.2: The *tavya pratyaya*[432]

The use of the *tavya* suffix associated with each word in BU 2.4.5 raises another problem for Śaṅkara because it appears to denote the sense of the imperative. Why is an injunctive used in connection with the triple process? Does this not support the contention that the process of knowledge, and *nididhyāsana* in particular, is an action? Though Śaṅkara does not discuss this in his commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the issue of *nididhyāsana* and injunctions was an important one, for it forms a significant part of the discussion in the *catuḥ sūtrī* in BSbh 1.1.4. Here the opponent complains that there is an incongruity between the example of removing error in the example of the rope/snake superimposition and removing error about oneself as *brahman*. Error is removed immediately by hearing about the nature of the rope, but this is not so with hearing about *brahman*. Even after *śravaṇa*, the individual still suffers as before. This is why the root passage of 2.4.5 points out an injunction about contemplation, so says the opponent.[433] In response Śaṅkara argues at length against viewing knowledge as an action that is subject to injunctions. Later, in the same *sūtra*'s commentary the opponent again quotes BU 2.4.5 as a support for the possibility of injunctions in *nididhyāsana*. Śaṅkara then gives a more pointed reply:

> Opponent: Why are there then texts like "The Self, my dear Maitreyī should be realized, should be heard of" etc. (BU 2.4.5), which have a semblance of injunction?

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[432] I draw here on Padmapāda' discussion of this in his *Pañcapādikā* (Venkataramiah 1948, pp. 143, 313-15).
[433] Gambhirananda 1996 p. 25.

> Vedāntin: We say that they are meant for weaning one back from objects towards which one inclines naturally. For a man hankering after the highest human goal and engaging in outward objects under the idea, "May good come to me, may not evil befall me", but failing to achieve thereby the highest human goal, there are such texts as, "The Self, my dear Maitreyī, should be realized". These turn him back from the objects, naturally attracting his body and senses etc., towards them, and then they lead him along the current of the indwelling Self.[434]

Śaṅkara provides another similar explanation in his commentary on BS 3.2.21:

> Expressions such as "(the self) is to be seen" (BrU 2.4.5, 4.5.6) are read in the context of the highest knowledge and are primarily meant to cause one to turn towards reality. They are not meant as an injunction to know reality. Even in common speech, when there are instructions said in the manner of "Look at this" and "Listen to this," they are only meant as "Pay attention" not as "Gain direct knowledge." Even for someone turned towards the object of knowledge, knowledge sometimes occurs and sometimes does not occur. Therefore, that object of knowledge alone should be seen due to the desire to impart knowledge. When that is seen, knowledge arises on its own according to the object and according to the means of knowledge. And when a fact is not established otherwise without a means of knowledge, another knowledge is not possible even for one who is enjoined. Even if one thinks "I am enjoined to know this knowledge otherwise" then that is not knowledge of the object. What is it then? It is a mental action.[435]

Śaṅkara explains that the *tavya pratyaya* in the context of BU 2.4.5 functions solely to direct the Advaitin's attention to a particular object. These statements do not have the specific function that the *tavya* or *vidhiliṇ* (optative) may have in the context of a Vedic ritual where they might mean an injunction such as an *apūrvavidhi* that enjoins an action. Rather they are used similarly to common parlance. When one states 'listen'

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434 Gambhirananda 1996 p. 35.

435 *draṣṭavyādiśabdā api paravidyādhikārapaṭhitās tattvābhimukhīkaraṇapradhānā na tattvāvabodhavidhipradhānā bhavanti | loke 'pīdaṃ paśyedam ākarṇayeti caivaṃ jātīyakeṣu nirdeśeṣu praṇidhānamātraṃ kurvity ucyate na sākṣājjñānam eva kurviti | jñeyābhimukhasyāpi jñānaṃ kadācij jāyate kadācin na jāyate tasmāt taṃ prati jñānaviṣaya eva darṣayitavyo jñāpayitukāmena | tasmindarṣite svayam eva yathāviṣayaṃ yathāpramāṇaṃ ca jñānam utpadyate | na ca pramāṇāntareṇānyathāprasiddhe*

or 'look,' there is a grammatical imperative. However, the imperative form only functions to bring one's attention to a particular thing. It is not enjoining knowledge itself. This is necessary because even when people stand in front of an object they may miss it if they do not specifically direct their attention to the object. Similarly, Śaṅkara claims that sentences such as BU 2.4.5 are meant to direct our attention. The *tavya pratyaya* functions by either turning one's mind towards the self or turning one's mind away from objects. Both of these conceptual directions are required, and match the two related meanings of concentration and ascertainment that we found with *niścaya*. In the context of *nididhyāsana*, turning the mind towards the self is contingent upon concentration and removing any distraction.

4.2: Contemplation in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.6-14

After telling Maitreyī the triple method for knowing *brahman* in BU 2.4.5, Yājñavalkya then precedes to explain the basic process. He provides a series of analogies, such as the sounds of a drum, a conch, and a *vīṇā* (a stringed musical instrument), that help explain the inherence of *brahman* in all things and points to the fundamental method underlying *nididhyāsana*. The various sounds that each emit when played are not distinguishable from the instrument in the sense that one cannot capture the sound without capturing its source. These analogies exemplify how all objects in the world exist due to *brahman* and have no existence apart from *brahman*. They are simply

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'rthe 'nyathājñānaṃ niyuktasyāpy upapadyate | yadi punar niyukto 'ham ity anyathā jñānaṃ kuryān na tu tajjñānaṃ kiṃ tarhi mānasī sā kriyā| (my translation).

modifications of *brahman*, their source. Yājñavalkya continues to give a series of analogies. In 2.4.11 he says:

> It is like this. As the ocean is the point of convergence of all the waters, so the skin is the point of convergence of all sensations of touch; the nostrils, of all odours; the tongue, of all tastes; sight, of all visible appearances; hearing, of all sounds; the mind, of all thoughts; the heart, of all sciences; the hands, of all activities; the sexual organ, of all pleasures; the anus, of all excretions; the feet, of all travels; and speech, of all the Vedas.[436]

Śaṅkara uses these analogies to outline a contemplative process in his commentary on BU 2.4.11:

> *As the ocean is the one goal*, meeting place, the place or dissolution or unification, *of all sorts of water* such as that of rivers, tanks and lakes. Likewise as the *skin is the one goal of all kinds of touch* such as soft or hard, rough or smooth, which are identical in nature with air. By the word 'skin,' touch in general that is perceived by the skin, is meant; in it different kinds of touch are merged, like different kinds of water in the ocean, and become nonentities without it, for they were merely its modifications. Similarly, that touch in general, denoted by the word 'skin,' is merged in the deliberation of the *manas*, that is to say, in a general consideration by it, just as different kinds of touch are included in touch in general perceived by the skin; without this consideration by the *manas* it becomes a nonentity. The consideration by the *manas* also is merged in a general cognition by the intellect, and becomes nonexistent without it. Becoming mere consciousness, it is merged in Pure Intelligence, the Supreme *brahman*, like different kinds of water in the ocean. When, through these successive steps, sound and the rest, together with their receiving organs, are merged in pure intelligence, there are no more limiting adjuncts, and only *brahman*, which is Pure Intelligence, comparable to a lump of salt, homogeneous, infinite, boundless and without a break, remains. Therefore the self alone must be regarded as one without a second.[437]

In his commentary Śaṅkara explains that one must collapse or merge the particular (*viśeṣa*) into the universal (*sāmāṇya*) which is its locus (*āyanam*), the place from which it

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[436] BU 2.4.11, Olivelle 1996, p. 29.
[437] BUbh 2.4.11. Madhavananda 1993, pp. 253-4.

arises and returns. This process begins with the sense objects. All touch is non-separate from the universal sense organ, skin. All sounds are merged into the ear, all smells into the nose, etc. Each sense organ perceives its respective objects, in all their variety, while remaining one and the same. Objects are unified in what perceives them, namely the sense organ, which remains changeless with reference to the changing sense objects. All the sense organs are perceived by the mind, along with all their changes. The mind perceives the changing sense organs, such as when the eyes are blind, blurred or clear, and is therefore the locus of the sense organs. Therefore one should resolve the senses into the mind. If the mind does not perceive the senses, then they would be a non-entity. Similarly the mind is merged with the higher intellect which perceives the aspects of the mind, such as desire, resolve, doubt, and emotions.[438] Finally the intellect is merged with *brahman*. All cognition is dependent on *brahman*, as pure awareness, for their existence. Through this process one is left only with *brahman*, the ultimate locus and untouched source of all things.

These successive steps negate all conditioning properties until one is left only with non-dual awareness. The second portion of the *mantra* refers to the organs of actions, grasping, procreation, excretion, walking, and speech. Śaṅkara writes that the organs of action are all merged in *prāṇa*, constituting the subtle body, which is then merged in *brahman*. Evident in this method is a gradual process of hierarchically subsuming particulars into their higher sources. This is a widening process that negates any conceived self-identities by penetrating each level and ultimately reaching one's true

[438] See BU 1.5.3 for the Upaniṣad's explanation of the mind.

self. The process is both exclusive and inclusive. At each step there is a jump to a broader more universal source, which on the one hand negates the previous more particular one consisting of dependent effects, yet includes it within the larger "universal" which is its cause. Thus all identities are excluded and simultaneously included as non-separate from one's self, which is *brahman*, the absolutely universal. All things are in it and not separate from it, but *brahman* is not them. Here, Śaṅkara's commentary points back to his doctrine of dependency (*mithyātvam*) and *anvaya* and *vyatireka* as constituting his theory of contemplation.

4.3: Contemplation in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*

The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* provides an important method for contemplative practice in verses 1.3.10-12. The Upaniṣad provides an ascending gradation of objects in terms of subtlety, innerness, and pervasiveness, moving from external objects to the highest goal, the *puruṣa*:

> Higher than the senses are their objects;
> Higher than sense objects is the mind;
> Higher than the mind is the intellect;
> Higher than the intellect is the immense self;
>
> Higher than the immense self is the unmanifest;
> Higher than the unmanifest is the person (*puruṣa*);
> Higher than the person there's nothing at all.
> That is the goal, that's the highest state.
>
> Hidden in all the beings, this self is not visibly displayed.
> Yet, people of keen vision see him, with eminent and sharp minds.[439]

[439] Olivelle 1996, p. 239.

This passage moves progressively from the senses, to the sense objects,[440] to the mind, intellect, and to the *mahān* (great one). Higher than the *mahān* is the unmanifest (*avyakta*) and finally, the person (*puruṣa*) is highest and is the same self hidden in all beings.[441] KU 1.3.13 then states the method for gaining this vision:

> The wise person should withdraw speech into the mind, he should withdraw that (mind) into the knowledge self (the intellect). He should place that intellect into the *mahān*, he should place that (*mahān*) into the tranquil self. [442]

Śaṅkara elucidates the process articulated in KU 1.3.13 further in BSbh 1.4.1.[443] There he explains that withdrawing speech refers to ceasing all activities related to the external organs of action. The Advaitin should hold the mind steady in the higher intellect (*buddhi*) for the mind (*manas*) will otherwise think of objects and possess faults such as doubt and indecision. The *buddhi* is more subtle and pervasive than the *manas*, the sense mind. One should then withdraw that intellect into the "immense self" (*mahān ātman*), by making the intellect clear (or calm) like the "first-born" *hiraṇyagarbha*.[444] Why this identification? Śaṅkara suggests two interpretations of the *mahān ātman*. It is either the experiencer behind all objects of experience, or it is the intellect of

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[440] In the BG 3.42 the senses are said to be higher than the sense objects. According to Śaṅkara, this hierarchy is based in subtlety, innerness, and pervasiveness. In the KUbh Śaṅkara explains that the senses are created for the sake of knowing objects and in that senses are lower than the objects. The sense objects determine the nature of the perceptual organs (also see BSbh 1.4.1 and BUbh 3.2.1-6).

[441] This refers to preceding chariot analogy.

[442] *yacched vāṅ manasi prājñas tad yacchej jñāna ātmani /*
jñānam ātmani mahati niyacchet tat yacchec chānta ātmani // KU 1.3.13 (my translation)..

[443] He also mentions it again in BSbh 3.3.15 as the meditation for understanding the *puruṣa*.

[444] What Śaṅkara exactly means by a clear intellect is unclear. In KUbh 1.3.13 he writes "*prathamajavat svacchabhāvakam ātmano vijñānam āpādayet*". In BSbh 1.4.1 he writes "…*sukṣmatāpādanena dhārayet*". Making the intellect clear (*svacchabhāvakam*) or subtle (*sukṣmatā*) may refer to refining the *buddhi* through meditation practice or perhaps it refers to gaining a deeper lucid understanding of *hiraṇyagarbha*

hiraṇyagarbha, the first born all pervading principle of intelligence, which resides inside all beings as their intellect. This is something akin to a universal mind, where *hiraṇyagarbha*, identified with *īśvara* is present in every being as the intellect. Finally, the *mahān ātman* is withdrawn into the "tranquil self", the *ātman* which is the most pervasive, non-dual, and identified with *brahman*. In KU 1.3.11, the Upaniṣad makes an additional distinction between the *mahān* and the absolute *ātman*, referring to the unmanifest from which the *mahān* arises. The absolute *ātman*, referred to as the *puruṣa*, is even beyond the unmanifest and not subject to any duality such as manifest and unmanifest, according to Śaṅkara's reading.

Śaṅkara understands these passages as laying out a contemplative process through which a wise person, who has developed sharp and subtle intellect, is able to perceive things at an increasingly subtle level.[445] The contemplative process is designed to reach what is ultimately real by the contemplator's following a hierarchical distinction based on subtlety, causality, permanence, and pervasiveness. It is difficult to say what Śaṅkara exactly means by "withdrawing" one thing into another, such as the intellect into the *mahān*. He glosses *yacchet* (the 3rd person singular optative of the root *yam*) with *upasaṁharet*, *niyacchet*, and *saṁyacchet*. These verbs share the meanings of placing, restraining, excluding, withdrawing, and controlling, and are often used in the contexts of meditation. However, the process of withdrawing is not a simple meditative one of ignoring distractions. There appears to be a process of focusing on the higher object through understanding its higher hierarchical position or greater ontological reality. Concentrating on that higher object naturally excludes the lower particular, yet simultaneously includes the particular within the larger underlying universal signified by the higher object. In recognizing the *puruṣa* (*brahman*), all other phenomena are understood as part and parcel of the *puruṣa*. Yet all

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and in effect finding a sense of merger by matching one's intellect with the universal mind of *hiraṇyagarbha*.

[445] KA 1.3.13.

phenomena born of ignorance are also understood as mere appearances and eliminated, just as water in the desert is eliminated when understood as a mirage.[446]

4.4: Contemplation in the *Bhagavadgītā*

We now turn to the detailed discussions of contemplative practice in chapter six of the *Bhagavadgītā*, aptly titled the "the yoga of meditation" (*dhyānayoga*). The contemplation in chapter six is an elaboration of the description presented in brief at the end of chapter five. In BG 5.27-8 we find the following verses:

> Keeping the external objects outside, the eyes at the juncture of the eye-brows, and making equal the outgoing and incoming breaths that move through the nostrils, the contemplative who has control over his organs, mind and intellect should be fully intent on liberation and free from desire, fear, and anger. He who is ever thus is verily free.[447]

Kṛṣṇa develops the ideas of these verses in 6.8-32. In 6.10-13 he explains the fundamentals of meditation, such as the location,[448] how to make a proper seat, how to sit and hold one's body, and how to focus the mind:

> A *yogī* should constantly concentrate his mind by staying in a solitary place, alone, with mind and body controlled, free from expectations, (and) free from acquisition.
>
> Having firmly established in a clean place his seat, neither too high nor too low, and made of cloth, skin and *kuśa*-grass, placed successively one below the other;
>
> (and) sitting on that seat, he should concentrate his mind for the purification of the internal organ, making the mind one-pointed and keeping the actions of the mind and senses under control.

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446 KAbh 1.3.13.
In 1.3.15once again we have a *neti neti* passage, presumably, following Śaṅkara, this is given so the person does not objectify *brahman*.

447 Gambhirananda 1995, p. 267.

448 Also see BGbh 13.10.

> Holding the body, head and neck erect and still, being steady, looking at the tip of his own nose – and not looking around.[449]

A number of actions in these verses, such as concentrating the mind, making the mind one pointed, keeping the external objects outside, keeping the eyes at the juncture of the eye-brows, and restraining thoughts and senses, are forms of the basic mental effort of meditation. When these verses are read along with the advice in BG 5.27, which guides the meditator to keep the exhalation and inhalation moving through the nostrils equal,[450] we find parallels to limbs three to six of Pata ñjali's Aṣṭāṇga Yoga, namely how to sit (*āsana*), how to breath (*prāṇāyāma*), how to restrain the activity of the mind and senses (*pratyāhāra*) and how to focus on a single object (*dhāraṇā*).[451]

Keeping external objects external means not dwelling upon them. The mind should not wonder distractedly due to thinking about external objects or situations. When mental modifications take the form of external objects, then external objects are brought within the mind and internalized. Many mental modifications are somewhat inconsequential, for the mind takes on forms that are benign. However, when external objects are associated with likes (*rāga*) and dislikes (*dveṣa*), in the form of "I want that" or "I want to be rid of that," then the internalized object is empowered, rooted in the psyche, and capable of distracting one's mind. Emotions such as anger, anxiety, or fear, which are subsequent to *rāga* and *dveṣa* and result from obstructed desires, then possess the mind. Kṛṣṇa's teaching of *karma yoga*, discussed in chapters two, three, and four of

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449 Gambhirananda 1995, pp. 286-88.
450 *prāṇāpānau samau kṛtvā nāsābhyantaracāriṇau*

the BG, is a specific method to neutralize *rāga* and *dveṣa*. Resolving such emotions and cravings, a prerequisite for pursuing *brahmavidyā* and *nididhāsana*, is necessary to a relative degree to establish an internal space available for successful meditation or contemplation.

The nature of the mind is to wander, but when one neutralizes *rāga* and *dveṣa* then external objects are not binding for the mind. However, even when *rāga* and *dveṣa* are neutralized, one must learn to restrain the mind to one object in order to meditate or contemplate successfully. A curious way of describing this one-pointedness (*ekāgratā*) is the *Bhagavadgīṭā*'s instruction to concentrate between the eyebrows or on the tip of the nose. Śaṅkara dismisses the literal meaning of this instruction. In his commentary on BG 6.13 he adds the particle *iva*, explaining that fixing the eyes on the tip of the nose is not meant literally, only "as though" or "as it were." Concentrating on the tip of the nose simply expresses the following statement of not to look around in other directions, meaning that one should keep the head steady and facing forward, and one should withdraw the mind from external objects.[452] If one is completely focused on one's nose than how can one contemplate the self? In fact, Śaṅkara clearly sees these verses as not simply describing basic meditation but as contemplation where one fixes the mind on the self.[453] However, it is important to note that there is no specific distinction made between

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[451] YS 2.29, 2.46-55, 3.1.
[452] Also see BGbh 8.10.
[453] It is interesting to note that the "tip" of one's nose may also refer to the top of the nose between the eyebrows, as in BG 5.27. If one does meditate on the tip of the nose literally, it may also connote the process of observing the breath.

contemplation and meditation internal to the *Bhagavdgītā* or in Śaṅkara's commentaries on the verses.

After providing basic details common to both meditation and *nididhyāsana*, Kṛṣṇa further explains the main idea of contemplation in verses 6.14-31 as allowing the mind to abide in the self. BG 6.14-15 states,

> He should remain seated with a placid mind, free from fear, firm in the vow of a celibate, and with the mind fixed on me by controlling it through concentration, having me as the supreme goal.
>
> Concentrating the mind thus forever, the *yogī* of controlled mind achieves the peace which culminates in liberation and which abides in me.[454]

In 6.14 Kṛṣṇa says that the contemplator, having controlled the mind and making it concentrated, should sit with mind fixed on him (*maccitto*), with him as the highest goal (*matparaḥ*). In 6.15 he states that connecting the mind and fixing it on him in this way (*yuñjann evaṁ sadātmānaṁ*). one gains the highest liberation. The first point to clarify is the object of this contemplation. It is a bit tricky in BG chapter six to understand the objective reference of the demonstrative first person pronoun "I" (*mat*) and its various forms when spoken by Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa could be referring to himself in the most limited way, as the friend of Arjuna and ruler of the Yādavas, yet this interpretation looks incongruous with the context. Another possibility is that he is referring to himself as *īśvara* in the form of lord Viṣṇu. From this standpoint he represents *brahman* as the universe and with attributes (*saguṇa brahman*). A third possibility is that there is a reference to himself as *brahman* without attributes (*nirguṇa brahman*), the true *ātman*.

Depending on the interpretation the corresponding practice may be viewed as a form of *upāsanā* or worship of *īśvara* as *saguṇa brahman* or as *nididhyāsana* on *nirguṇa brahman*. This dual possibility is also present in verses such as 6.14, with phrases such as "with mind fixed on me" (*mat-citta*), or "with me as the highest" (*mat-parah*). However, Śaṅkara interprets such verses as not referring to Kṛṣṇa as an individual, a deity or as *īśvara*, who is the cause of the world, but to his true nature as the highest lord (*parameśvara*) synonymous with non-dual *brahman*.[455] And indeed, such identification seems evident in the interchangeable usage of *ātman*, *brahman*, and *mat* in the contemplation verses in chapter six. This is a crucial point, for it pulls our idea of the process presented in this chapter away from that of worship, *upāsanā*, or basic forms of yogic meditation, processes that are all based in duality, and identifies it as *nididhyāsana* on the *svarūpa* of *ātman*. Keeping one's mind on *parameśvara* is no different than continuously maintaining one's knowledge of *brahman*.[456]

Kṛṣṇa goes on to provide more details about this contemplation in verses 6.18-25:

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454 Gambhirananda 1995, pp. 288-9.

455 Sometimes *brahman* is also identified in the BG as *parameśvara* (the highest lord) who may be either wither with attributes (*saguṇa*) or without attributes (*nirguṇa*). Śaṅkara himself is ambiguous with regard to interpreting the *brahman* mentioned as the higher or lower. It is quite likely that he was not too keen on maintaining this distinction and prefers to use *parameśvara* as a reference to absolute *brahman*. Śaṅkara sometimes uses *brahman* and *parameśvara* as synonyms, without the clear distinction of being with or without attributes.

456 We find a similar situation in other places in the BG. For example, in BG chapter eight Kṛṣṇa refers to keeping *īśvara* in mind through a process called *abhyāsa yoga*. It is possible to take this as a type of *ahaṅgraha upāsanā,* where one creates and maintains cognition of identity between self and *īśvara*. However, Śaṅkara interprets these verses as indicating *nididhyāsana*, and dealing with knowledge of *īśvara* as *brahman* rather than a superimposition of identity. In a number of verses, such as BG 8.9, which describes the *parama puruṣa* as inconceivable, etc., it is clear that the text is discussing *nirguṇa brahman*, not *saguṇa īśvara*.

> A man who has become free from hankering for all desirable objects is then said to be self-absorbed when the controlled mind rests in the self alone (6.18).
>
> As a lamp kept in a windless place does not flicker, such is the simile thought of for the *yogī* whose mind is under control, and who is engaged in concentration on the self (6.19).
>
> At the time when the mind restrained through the practice of yoga gets withdrawn, and just when by seeing the self by the self one remains contented in the self alone (6.20);
>
> When one experiences that absolute bliss which can be intuited by the intellect and which is beyond the senses, and being established (thus) this person surely does not swerve from reality (6.21);
>
> Obtaining which one does not think of any other acquisition to be superior to that, and being established in which one is not perturbed even by great sorrow (6.22);
>
> One should know that severance of contact with sorrow to be what is called yoga. That yoga has to be practiced with perseverance and with an undepressed heart (6.23).
>
> By totally eschewing all desires which arise from thoughts, and restraining with the mind itself all the organs from every side (6.24);
>
> One should gradually withdraw with the intellect endowed with steadiness. Making the mind fixed in the Self, one should not think of anything whatsoever (6.25).[457]

Verse 6.19 illustrates this contemplative mind with the simile of a flame that does not flicker. This analogy is not simply the mind staying focused but specifically the mind contemplating the *ātman* and constantly seeing all things as the *ātman*.[458] The key verses that summarize the *Bhagavadgītā*'s contemplation are 6.24-25. Verse 6.24 provides two

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[457] Gambhirananda 1995, pp. 292-7

[458] Also see BGbh 8.8 where Śaṅkara defines *abhyāsa yoga* as "the repetition of the same kind of thought, uninterruptedly by any contrary idea, with regard to me who am the object of concentration of the mind; that practice itself is yoga; the mind of a yogī is engrossed (*yuktam*) in that itself" (Gambhirananda 1995, p. 347).

preliminary steps that prepare the student: (1) Renouncing all desires born of thoughts, and (2) completely withdrawing the group of sense organs (from their sense objects) with the mind alone. Verse 25 then provides the next two steps comprising contemplation itself: (3) With the intellect endowed with steadiness (or fortitude) one should slowly resolve or withdraw (*uparamet*); and (4) having made the mind abide in the self, one should not think of anything else, meaning one should meditate that there is nothing here other than *ātman*. The surrounding verses provide similar basic definitions of contemplation with statements such as "he remains in the self alone" (*ātmany evāvatiṣṭhate*), "seeing the self by one's self" (*ātmanātmānaṁ paśyan*), "he delights in the self" (*ātmani tuṣyati*), and "not moving away from the truth (of *ātman*)" (*na calati tattvataḥ*). These statements refer to *nididhyāsana* and something like a point of clarity where the mind naturally stays fixed on the self. These verses do not appear to point to any new *brahmavidyā* being created. They describe a contemplative process of gaining clarity in *brahmavidyā*.[459]

Neither the BG nor Śaṅkara furnish a clear methodology for exactly how one abides in the self or sees the self by one's self. "Residing in the self" is the culmination of the contemplative process stated in 6.25, "With the intellect endowed with steadiness (or fortitude) (*dhṛti*), one should slowly (*śanaiḥ*) resolve (or withdraw [thoughts from their objects]) (*uparamet*)." This is a fecund sentence giving us three clues, the Sanskrit words

459 *Dhyāna yoga* is also the same as *anusmarana* (8.7, 8.9) and *anucintayan* (8.8). There, Śaṅkara explains the prefix *anu* as "in keeping with the *śāstra* and logic." Thus, this is contemplation based on knowledge from a *pramāṇa*, following *śravaṇa* and *manana*. It is based on memory.[459] There is no new *pramāṇa* taking place and no new knowledge arising, one is simply keeping the mind fixed on what is already known.

dhṛti, *śanaiḥ,* and *uparamet*. Śaṅkara glosses *dhṛti* only with the related and not very helpful word, *dhairyena*. *Dhṛti* may refer to the courage and firmness required to maintain one's contemplation of unity in the face of duality. It also may refer to wisdom and discrimination. Both interpretations may be the same in this context if we interpret firmness as remaining grounded in *brahmavidyā*. *Dhṛti* may parallel *niścayena* in 6.23, which Śaṅkara glosses with the phrase, *adhyavasayena yoktavyaḥ,* referring either to effort, perseverance, and determination or clarity and apprehension.[460]

The second question is what it means to slowly resolve or slowly withdraw (*śanaiḥ uparamet*) and what is being withdrawn? The issue resembles the difficulty of translating *yacchet* in KU 1.3.13. Śaṅkara makes a reference to withdrawing later in BGbh 13.24 where he provides another brief definition of contemplation as pulling back (*upasamhṛtya*) the sense organs, such as the ears, etc, from their sense objects such as sound, etc., into the mind; and then pulling back the mind into the self. Pulling back refers to a somewhat mysterious contemplative process of letting go of all sense objects and progressively "resolving" the mind, with all its components, into the self. When the *manas* is thus fixed on the self, it abides in self-knowledge. The *manas*, which is naturally in a state of constant flux, will not easily stay fixed on the self. Like all forms of meditation, the contemplator must bring the *manas* back from distraction to the object of meditation, however in this unique case, the *manas* comes back to oneself, not an

[460] This question of translation parallels the difference of possible interpretations of *niścaya* in BU 2.4.5.

Dhṛti can also refer to the courage it takes to keep the intellect fixed on this knowledge because non-duality is so radically different that one's former world view and it negates the ego, the world, and everything else one holds dear

object. Implicit to this contemplation is that all adventitious personality must be "resolved" also. Śaṅkara does not clarify the exact meaning of "resolve." Does he mean the *manas* is somehow dissolved into *brahman*, leading to mental cessation (*cittavṛttinirodha*), or does he mean a change in one's understanding of self and a radically transformed vision of self and world, or both? This question is open to debate, but Śaṅkara's emphasis is most likely not on mental cessation because elsewhere he clearly refutes Patañjali Yoga's emphasis on *cittavṛttinirodha*.[461] The term *śanaiḥ*, which is repeated for emphasis, indicates that this is a gradual contemplative process. Śaṅkara glosses *śanaiḥ,* as "not all at once" (*na sahasā*). It is gradual in that it resolving occurs at different levels of subtlety, from object to self, and takes time.

Śaṅkara provides a unique method of bringing the mind back to the self in his commentary on the following verse, BG 6.26:

> For whatever reason the wandering and unsteady mind goes, having restrained it (the mind) from that, one should bring (the mind), under control, to the self alone. (6.26).[462]

In his commentary, Śaṅkara writes,

> One should bring the mind, under control, to the self alone, having recognized each cause (of distraction) as an appearance by the ascertainment of their truth and with an attitude of detachment.... In this way, the mind of the *yogī* rests in the *ātman* alone through the strength of the practice of *yoga*.[463]

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[461] BSbh 2.1.9. See my discussion in chapter six.

[462] *yato yato niścarati manaś cañcalam asthiram |*
tatas tato niyamyaitad ātmany eva vaśam nayet || 6.26 (my translation).

[463] *tattan nimittaṁ yāthātmyanirūpaṇena ābhāsīkṛtya vairāgyabhāvanayā ca etat manaḥ ātmany eva vaśaṁ nayet…evaṁ yogābhyāsabalāt yoginaḥ ātmany eva praśāmyati manaḥ* (my translation).

Śaṅkara's reference to objects as appearances is not to a process of simply dismissing them as illusions or as non-existent. Nor is it to a process of mentally repeating the idea that objects are appearances or looking at objects and conceiving them as *brahman*. This contemplation is the direct recognition that their names and forms are superficial and completely dependent on unqualified existence for their reality. This represents a shift in perspective, analogous to seeing a variety of golden ornaments and realizing that their truth, or content, is uniformly gold despite their appearance as names and forms. *Nididhyāsana* is a matter of abstracting away all particularities of the world through recognizing what remains unchanging within changing phenomena.

Seeing objects as non-separate from their ultimate substratum allows one to see through appearances and penetrate to their true reality as pure undifferentiated being. One has to then recognize this being as self-evident existence, which is none other than the individual's self-luminous awareness. In this process the contemplator fixes his or her mind on the *ātman* by recognizing that the existence of objects is not different than the awareness witnessing the object. This last step is a big one. The transition to identifying being (*sat*) and awareness (*cit*) is difficult to explain either philosophically or phenomenologically, and likely the most difficult obstacle in one's contemplative practice; but recall our discussion of the sentence *tat tvam asi*. The contemplative process negates all particularities and adventitious qualities of the world and the self and finds the continues presence of *tat* and *tvam*. At the culminating point of this process there are no more boundaries to circumscribe either undifferentiated being or self-luminous awareness and their identity ought to be self-evident to the contemplator.

According to Śaṅkara's explication, contemplative method is a fundamentally different method for the basic meditation of withdrawing the mind from sense objects and gaining an attitude of dispassion (*vairāgya*), because it relies on the power of knowledge, not mental effort. Just as one does not need to melt an ornament to understand it is gold, so too one does not need to "destroy" perceptual objects, emotions, and distractions by avoiding them or suppressing them by stopping the thoughts of the mind. Recognizing the dependent (*mithyā*) status of objects not only neutralizes them as distractions, but also points to their essential nature as pure existence. Without the underlying *pramāṇa* of the Upaniṣads the student may stop at this point, but the next step is to use existence as a transition to shift to the self. This ultimately brings the contemplator back to the *ātman* because he or she knows that undifferentiated existence is the same as self-illuminating awareness having been properly exposed to this wisdom through *śravaṇa*. When the contemplator is distracted and carried into an external object, he or she simply needs to shift perspectives by recognizing the reality of *brahman* making up every object. This resolves the cause of distraction and turns the tables by allowing the distraction to point to its substratum of existence free of particularities, which then leads to an identification with the self. Each object, situation, concept, desire, emotion, etc., becomes a contemplative link, a means to penetrate and connect subjective and objective realities and to see oneself as unqualified *brahman*. From this perspective objects and distractions are not simply distractions or problems, but means to contemplation.

BG 6.27-33 describes the liberated person. Though verses 6.29-31 primarily describe the type of vision this *jñanī* has as a result of successful contemplation, we may

view them as a further elaboration of contemplation. These verses articulate different ways of appreciating self-knowledge by maintaining the vision of sameness everywhere (*sarvatra samadarśanaḥ)* and abiding in an appreciation of this reality:[464]

> One who has his mind self-absorbed through *yoga*, and who has the vision of sameness everywhere, sees his self existing in everything, and everything in his self (6.29).
>
> One who sees me in everything, and sees all things in me – I do not go out of his vision, and he also is not lost to my vision. (6.30).
>
> That *yogī* who, being established in unity, adores me as existing in all things, he exists in me – in whatever condition he may be (6.31).[465]

Verse 6.29 offers two conceptual directions for what is basically the same contemplation in the final analysis. The first is looking outwards and recognizing all objects as one's self. The second is looking inwards and recognizing everything outside within the self. Both lead to the infinite self, but the former moves through a contemplative analysis of name, form, and existence, and the latter through contemplating one's self as awareness. This is important for our interpretation of s*amadarśana*. The point seems to be not to see everything equally or to treat them equally, but to understand that their basis is the same *brahman*.[466]

Verse 6.30 parallels 6.29, yet brings *īśvara* into one's contemplative practice from a different contemplative angle. It points out the non-difference of *īśvara* and all objects

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464 One issue that becomes apparent in the *Bhavadgītā*'s brief and enigmatic explanation of *dhyāna-yoga* is the multivalent way the meditation can be understood, either as simple *dhyāna* meditation (early parts) as *upāsanā* or as *nididhyāsana*. The *nididhyāsana* is further complicated concerning whether it functions to gain knowledge or if it is a description of the liberated individual who continues to lead a contemplative life.

465 Gambhirananda 1995, pp. 300-1.

466 BG 5.18.

and results in an equation between self and *īśvara* in 6.31. Devotion (*bhakti*) is elevated to a form of contemplation by understanding *īśvara* as the same as *brahman* and one's self. For Advaitins, this type of contemplation, sometimes referred to in the BG as unwavering devotion (*ananya bhakti*), is not devotion dependent on worship, *upāsanā*, or experiences of deep emotional attachment to a conception of God as distinct from one's self. It is what Śaṅkara considers as the highest *bhakti* due to understanding complete unity between *īśvara*, *brahman*, and individual.[467] This seems also understood with the phrase "for him I am not lost" (*tasya aham na praṇaśyāmi*), which refers to the absolute identity of *īśvara* and individual according to Śaṅkara. *Īśvara* is never remote or away from the individual, and is immediately available as the self of the individual who understands this vision. At that point there is no situation or experience where one can feel distant from *īśvara* because *īśvara* is never away from oneself.[468]

4.5: The *parisaṅkhyāna* Contemplation in the *Upadeśasāhasrī*

Śaṅkara breaks his usual reticence on the topic of contemplation in the third prose chapter of the US. The prose section (*gadyabandha*) is composed of three chapters, which appear to outline the triple process of *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*. They are of special significance, for the three prose chapters are one of the few textual instances where Śaṅkara details the kind of advice an Advaita teacher should share with a

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[467] See BGbh 7.17, where Śaṅkara describes the knower of reality (*jñānin*) as an *eka-bhakti*, whose devotion is focused on *īśvara* because he knows *īśvara* is his own self and is non-dual, therefore the only appropriate locus to direct *bhakti*.
[468] BGbh 6.30.

student. The first chapter describes the qualifications of the ideal student and the proper teacher, and explains the primary intention of the Upaniṣads, including the means to liberation and the identity of the individual and *brahman*. The second chapter narrates a discussion between teacher and student. It describes the student's process of *manana* through his questions and the teacher's resolution of his doubts. The third chapter is a rare instance where Śaṅkara clearly details a particular form of *nididhyāsana* named *parisaṅkhyāna*.[469]

There is some doubt whether Śaṅkara is the authentic author of the US, and specifically if he authored the three prose chapters, which stand apart from the nineteen metrical chapters (*padyabandha*). Mayeda, who argues convincingly and extensively for Śaṅkara's authorship of the US,[470] comments that other texts such as Sure śvara'a *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi*, Bhāskara's *Gīṭabhāṣya*, Vidyāraṇya's *Pañcadaśī,* and Sadānanda's *Vedāntasāra* only quote verses from the metrical section and not the prose section. However, Mayeda does not feel this is sufficient evidence to doubt Śaṅkara's authorship of the prose section. In support of Śaṅkara's authorship of the prose chapters, Mayeda notes that Śaṅkara's direct student, Toṭaka, imitates the prose section in his *Śrutisārasamuddhāraṇa*. Mayeda also claims that there is no significant difference in the

469 Curiously, this is only one of two places that I have found in all of Śaṅkara's work where he uses the term *parisaṅkhyāna* as a form of *nididhyāsana*. The other location is BUbh 4.4.2. Mayeda also cites KU *pada bhāṣya* 1.5.29 (Mayda 1992, p. 254 fn. 1) but I'm unable to find this.

Śaṅkara may occasionally use the term *parisaṅkhyāna* in the context of a *parisaṅkhyāna* injunction but that is not a context for *nididhyāsana*. This brings up the relationship between *parisaṅkhyāna* and the *parisaṅkhyāna vidhi*. I think the connection is not direct or important. See Bader 1990 pp. 78-80, who makes a connection with *anvaya-vyatireka* and explains that exclusion is common to both. Also see Vidyasankaran 1998.

use of terms between the prose and metrical sections, though he does not consider the term *parisaṅkhyāna*.[471]

As explained earlier (in chapter two), Śaṅkara refutes the *prasaṅkhyāna* contemplation as a legitimate path leading to liberation in US metrical chapter eighteen. However, the term *prasaṅkhyāna* is strikingly similar to *parisaṅkhyāna*. Both share the verbal root *saṁkhyā* and the basic meaning of enumeration. And both are used as forms of contemplation. This similarity makes his refutation of *prasaṅkhyāna* and his explanation of *prasaṅkhyāna* somewhat conspicuous. Why does Śaṅkara use such similar terms in the same text, when they may lead to confusion? And how might we separate these two practices? Why does he label his contemplation *parisaṅkhyāna* here and not use it elsewhere, other than a fleeting mention to it in BUbh 4.4.2. In chapter 18, where he refutes the idea that *prasaṅkhyāna* is important, there is no mention or acceptance of any contemplative practice. In fact, other than in prose chapter 3, Śaṅkara does not discuss contemplation in the entire US. Some scholars, noting the discrepancy of prose chapter 3 and metrical chapter 18, suggest that Śaṅkara may be self-contradictory.[472] If these sections contradict each other, then this lends some doubt to the

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[470] See Mayeda (1965) for many arguments in favor of Śaṅkara's authorship, such as the ratio of Upaniṣadic citations that are similar to the BSbh, Śaṅkara's use of particular terms, etc.

[471] Mayeda 1965, p. 196.

[472] See Kunjanni Raja 1990, pp. 191-193 and Mayeda 1992 pp. 88-9, 197, and p. 245.
Mayeda claims that both *prasaṅkhyāna* and *parisaṅkhyāna* are not knowledge but kinds of actions. He believes Śaṅkara is intentionally contradicting himself by refuting action and prescribing it at the same time, and questions "for what purpose does he knowingly sacrifice logical and theoretical consistency?" (Mayeda 1992, p. 89). I think this is unlikely.
Kunjanni Raja makes a better argument. He believes Śaṅkara must have made some distinction between *prasaṅkhyāna* and *parisaṅkhyāna*, where *parisaṅkhyāna* is not mental concentration involving action or an *asaṁprajñāta samādhi* state (Kunjanni Raja 1990, p. 193).

authenticity of the prose section.[473] But even if Śaṅkara did not write the prose chapters, why would later authors insert a description of *prasaṅkhyāna* in chapter three? One possibility we should not rule out is that there was a later movement to incorporate more contemplative practices in Advaita? Another possibility is that the discrepancy reflects Śaṅkara's own ambivalence about *nididhyāsana*, where on the one hand he recognizes it as an important part of spiritual practice, but on the hand, struggles to place it coherently into his philosophical system. In any case, this discrepancy is not strong enough evidence to reach a conclusion about Śaṅkara's authorship, and it is prudent to assume it is his.

Śaṅkara does not clearly define who requires the *parisaṅkhyāna* contemplation. In the first line of the chapter he writes,

> This *parisaṅkhyāna* is said to be for those who desire liberation, who are devoting themselves to destroying their acquired merit and demerit and do not wish to accumulate new ones.[474]

Clearly this is a qualified student (outlined in USG 2-3) who is not a novice to Advaita teachings, however, it is unclear whether this student is already a knower of *brahman* who has gained liberation, though this seems unlikely. One would assume he is not yet liberated and has not destroyed his ignorance and gained clarity in self-knowledge if he requires this contemplation and is still desirous of liberation. But in USG 114

[473] Or it is possible that Śaṅkara just truly contradicted himself. But considering the craftsmanship of this text, I find it hard to believe he was unaware of or comfortable with this conspicuous contradiction. It makes more sense to interpret the two in a non-contradictory method or conclude that the third chapter or chapter 18 is a later addition from a different author.
[474] *mumukṣūṇāṃ upāttapuṇyāpunyakṣapaṇaparāṇāṁ apūrvānupacayārthināṁ parisaṇkhyānam idam ucyate* | USG 112 (my translation).

Śaṅkara writes, "The wise person (*vidvān*) who is distressed by sounds, etc, which are being perceived, should do the *parisaṅkhyāna* contemplation."[475] Here, the one who desires liberation (*mumukṣu*) is characterized as a *vidvān*. Unfortunately Śaṅkara does not clarify what kind of knowledge the *vidvān* possesses, but we must assume he possesses at least some form of conceptual self-knowledge.[476] This is a student who has gone through a thorough process of listening and reflection detailed in the first two chapters and is at an advanced stage of study. He already possesses self-knowledge because he has studied the Upaniṣads with a qualified teacher. So we cannot claim he has no conceptual knowledge whatsoever of *brahman*. However, this *vidvān* is certainly not the ideal Advaitin who is fully liberated and established in understanding *brahman* and we may assume this knowledge is not liberating *brahmavidyā*.[477] The contemplation is for the person who has studied the Upaniṣads, yet at the same time is afflicted by the objects he perceives.[478]

In the first passage of chapter three (USG 112) Śaṅkara explains that *parisaṅkhyāna* destroys *puṇya* and *pāpa*. He further explains that *avidyā* causes *doṣas* (faults), which in turn cause activity of the mind, speech, and body. The fruit of this activity is desirable and undesirable results of *karma*. Śaṅkara brings up the *parisaṅkhyāna* contemplation as a means to destroy the results of *karma*, thereby releasing one from *karma*. This raises some questions; particularly, what kind of *karma*

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[475] *tatra śabdādibhiḥ upalakṣyamānaiḥ pīḍyamāno vidvān evaṃ parisaṃcakṣīta* | USG 114 (my translation).
[476] Toward the end of the chapter in USG 116 he uses *viduṣaḥ,* another term for a wise man.
[477] Śaṅkara describes the ideal teacher in US 2.1.6.

is he referring to, and how does *parisaṅkhyāna* effect that *karma*? Is Śaṅkara referring to the idea that one is freed from *saṃcita karma* (the unseen total of one's accrued *karma*) and *āgāmi karma* (*karma* accrued during one's life) through *moksa* because of the cessation of any identity with the mind and body, due to which there is no more agency to create *karma* or a locus for accumulated *karma* to cling to? And if so, is there any specification of the particular purpose of *parisaṅkhyāna*? Freedom from *karma* is stated as a generic result of self-knowledge. How is *parisaṅkhyāna* differentiated from this basic result? It appears that Śaṅkara sees *parisaṅkhyāna* as a means specifically to neutralize *prārabdha karma* (*karma* that has begun) and/or its afflictive effects.[479]

Parisaṅkhyāna is required when situations or objects afflict the Advaitin even after studying the Upaniṣads. Śaṅkara does not identify it as a basic form of meditation nor does he discuss any mental states, experiences, or worship as part of the process. The basic premise behind the contemplation is the possibility of discrimination of the perceiver and perceived and the repeated recognition of the perceiver as *brahman*. Anything perceived possesses attributes, is born and perishes, is connected and separated, etc., and of a fundamentally different nature than the perceiver. In USG 115 Śaṅkara specifies that the *vidvān* should repeat,

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[478] This state is described in more detail in the next chapter.

[479] These effects may be *viparītabhāvanā*s (contradictory tendencies), a type of problematic *saṁskāra*s (habitual psychological impressions). It is not clear whether *saṁskāra*s are the faults caused by *avidyā* (along with *raga* (like), *dveśa* (dislike), *kāma* (desire), *krodha* (anger), etc.) or the desirable and undesirable results of action. In other contexts, *saṁskāra*s, in the form of *viparītabhāvanā*s, are the impressions generated from *prārabdhakarma* but not identified with *karma*. In other contexts. Śaṅkara recommends *saṁnyāsa* as a process of letting go of *karma*, but no such recommendation occurs in this chapter and he does not make it a necessary part of *parisaṅkhyāna* , though in the first chapter he identifies the qualified student as a *saṁnyāsin*.

> I (=[ā]tman) am of the nature of [s]eeing, non-object (=subject) unconnected [with anything], changeless, motionless, endless, fearless, and absolutely subtle. So sound cannot make me its object and touch me, whether as mere noise in general or as [sound] of particular qualities – pleasant [sounds] such as the first note of music or the desirable words of praise and the like, or the undesirable words of untruth, disgust, humiliation, abuse, and the like – since I am unconnected [with sound]. For this very reason neither loss nor gain is caused [in me] by sound. Therefore, what can the pleasant sound of praise, the unpleasant sound of blame, and so on do to me? Indeed a pleasant sound may produce gain, and an unpleasant one destruction, for a man lacking in discriminating knowledge, who regards sound as [connected with his] [ā]tman since he has no discriminating knowledge. But for me who am endowed with discriminating knowledge, [sound] cannot produce even a hair's breadth [of gain or loss].[480]

This includes all manifestations of sound, such as pleasant, false, insulting, praising, or abusive words. The contemplator understands that sounds cannot affect him or her by recognizing the self as free and unattached. He or she cannot gain or lose anything from them because the self is intrinsically whole and complete. Śaṅkara proceeds to repeat this teaching in terms of each type of sense perception through the remainder of USG 114. Touch, manifest as sickness, pain, hot or cold, etc., vision as pleasurable and ugly sights, taste as pleasant and unpleasant tastes, and smell as pleasurable or disgusting, all have no effect on the self.

Śaṅkara explains in USG 116 that,

> Moreover, whatever sound and the other external [objects of the senses] may be, they are changed into the form of the body, and into the form of the ear and the other [senses] which perceive them, and into the form of the two internal organs and their objects [such as pleasure and pain], since they are mutually connected and composite in all cases of actions. This being the case, to a me, a man of knowledge, nobody is foe, friend or neutral.[481]

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[480] Mayeda 1992, p. 252.
[481] Mayeda 1992, p. 253.

According to Śaṅkara, sounds and other external objects, including their associated pains, pleasures, and their impressions,[482] are transformed into the body and sense organs and have the mind and intellect as their locus. Thus they are of the mind and not the true self. There is no friend or foe for the wise man and no one can connect the wise man with anything pleasant or unpleasant or with any results of action in the form of merit or demerit. The wise person understands that he is free from old age, death, and fear because nothing exists outside of his self.

4.5.2: *Anvaya* and *vyatireka* in *parisaṅkhyāna*

The method of discrimination (*viveka*) between the self and not-self presented in the first two chapter of the US is clearly evident in Śaṅkara's explanation of *parisaṅkhyāna*. Śaṅkara affirms the nature of the *ātman* as unobjectifiable, infinite, unlimited by time or space, and unconnected to anything else. The corollary of this affirmation is the impossibility of any connection of the self with mental afflictions and the things that cause affliction.

As explained earlier, *anvaya* and *vyatireka* is the primary method that Śaṅkara endorses. This method is clearly evident in *śravaṇa* and *manana*, but it is not clear how this method can or should function in *nididhyāsana*. Some scholars, such as Cardona and Sundaresan, state that there is no *anvaya* and *vyatireka* in meditation. Cardona writes that *anvaya* and *vyatireka* is only a mode of reasoning and not a kind of meditation.[483] He specifically refutes Mayeda's claim that *anvaya* and *vyatireka* is a meditational

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[482] See USG 34.6. Also see USP 15.13.

method.[484] Sundaresan claims that *anvaya* and *vyatireka* is not a prominent feature in *parisaṅkhyāna*, and that it seems as if *parisaṅkhyāna* is intended to be taught before the instruction of *tat tvam asi*, whereas *anvaya* and *vyatireka* enter into the picture only after the instruction of *tat tvam asi* according to Śaṅkara.[485]

Cardona is partly right for taking exception to the term "meditation". *Anvaya* and *vyatireka* are usually terms for inductive procedure. A process of reasoning moves through a series of different cognitions and is naturally opposed to meditation defined as maintaining a flow of similar thoughts. In most forms of *dhyānam* and *upāsanā* there is no possibility of *anvaya* and *vyatireka* as mental processes. However, Mayeda uses the ambiguous term "meditation" to denote *parisaṅkhyāna* in the US. In this there does appear to be taught an active contemplation, which first recognizes afflictions and objects and then moves through a process of repetition and affirmation of one's self-recognition through *anvaya* and *vyatireka*. On the other hand, it is difficult to decide if *parisaṅkhyāna* does incorporate a more active reasoning process. While it is logical that there is no active process of *anvaya* and *vyatireka* reasoning in *nididhyāsana* (which I believe is more or less synonymous with *parisaṅkhyana*), such reasoning still constitutes the source and mechanism that makes *nididhyāsana* possible. The continuous remembered cognition of one's self as *brahman* in *nididhyāsana* is a product of *anvaya* and *vyatireka*. Perhaps we can say that *anvaya* and *vyatireka* are analogous to a grammar that becomes transparent when one reaches total fluency in *nididhyāsana*. At that point the

483 Cardona 1981, p. 93.
484 Cardona 1981, p. 104 and Mayeda 1992 p. 52, 56. Also see Bader 1990, p. 79.

contemplator feels no dependence on the contemplative grammar and makes no conscious use of it, but the grammar remains as part of the underlying structure.[486]

Perhaps *nididhyāsana* is not one simple practice, but a process with different manifestations. The *anvaya* and *vyatireka* method may be implicit as structure when contemplation is in the form of a continuous flow of memory (*smṛti-santati*) holding cognitions of *atma-brahma-aikyam*. In other forms of contemplation it may be an active process that allows one to gain greater depth and clarity in the discrimination of self and not-self (*ātma-anātma-viveka*). It one sense it is more active than meditation because there is a process of recognizing and responding to afflictions along with reaffirming one's understanding of *brahman*, but it is the activity of the *śabda pramāṇa*, and not the individual dependent activity of meditation. Such an approach allows one to regard *anvaya* as a reasoning process. However, in Śaṅkara's *parisaṅkhyāna* contemplation, the wise person who has already done *śravaṇa* and *manana*, does not require *anvaya* and *vyatireka* to resolve basic doubts or to understand the Advaita teaching for the first time, but naturally follows it while repeating his understanding of *brahman*.

The argument that *anvaya* and *vyatireka* are not present in *parisaṅkhyāna* depends on making a fundamental distinction between *anvaya-vyatireka* and *ātma-anātma viveka*, which is clearly present in the contemplation.[487] As argued earlier there

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485 Sundaresan 1998, p. 76.

486 I explain this theory of a contemplative grammar later in the chapter.

487 For example, see Sundaresan 1998, p. 74. Sundaresan makes an interesting argument that *parisaṅkhyāna* is to develop *ātma-anātma-viveka* in order that *tat tvam asi* can be grasped immediately. By placing *parisaṅkhyāna* at this point of the study process, as part of gaining the preparedness and eligibility (*adhikāritvam*) for *brahmavidyā*, Sundaresan attempts to avoids conflation of *parisaṅkhyāna* and *prasaṅkhyāna* (which comes after understanding the sentence) and the contradiction that would entail in

is no absolute difference between the methods of *atma-anātma viveka*, in the form of negating (*neti neti*) associations of self and mind/body, and *anvaya-vyatireka* and implication (*lakṣaṇā*). They are essentially the same methods, though their names emphasize different aspects of the process. *Parisaṅkhyāna* uses sublation in terms of a perceiver/perceived distinction yet points to the self (the perceiver) as what is continuous and unchanging. This clearly involves on *anvaya* and *vyatireka*. If *anvaya* and *vyatireka* does not precede or structure *parisaṅkhyāna*, the process cannot be a part of *parisaṅkhyāna*. This position would potentially reduce *parisaṅkhyāna* to some kind of meditation separate from studying the Upaniṣads, either as a preparatory stage for gaining mental purity or as the *prasaṅkhyāna* method that Śaṅkara rejects in chapter eighteen. In either case it becomes an activity that cannot result in self-knowledge.

Interpreting *anvaya* and *vyatireka* as necessarily preceding or present within *parisaṅkhyāna* is more faithful to the text and more coherent with Śaṅkara's system. Śaṅkara refers to the one doing *parisaṅkhyāna* as a *vidvān* and a *viduṣaḥ*. Clearly this individual has undergone *śravaṇa* and has some degree of intellectual clarity about the *mahāvākya*s stating the identity of self and *brahman*. He only needs to remind himself of what he already knows, and thus is intimate with *anvaya-vyatireka*. It is also textually incongruous to claim *parisaṅkhyāna* precedes understanding a *mahāvākya* like *tat tvam asi,* or is only to be used for understanding *tvam* and not the complete equation, i.e., given that the prose chapters endorse the chronology of the triple method. The US

Śaṅkara's writing. The basic issue at stake here is the chronology within the process of contemplation and whether contemplation is possible before or after understanding the *mahāvākya*.

explains sentences such as *tat tvam asi* earlier in prose chapter one. Moreover, the three prose chapters read as a complete text that encapsulates the entire Advaita teaching. There is nothing else for one to do after completing the discipline laid down. The two earlier chapters do not explicitly describe the *anvaya* and *vyatireka* process by name, but they make use of it in numerous passages and in different teaching sections (*prakriyā*s).[488] *Parisaṅkhyāna* is a "knowledge" contemplation wholly dependent on one's understanding the *mahāvākya*s, which in their turn employ *anvaya* and *vyatireka*. Śaṅkara affirms the intimate relationship of *parisaṅkhyāna* and understanding the Upaniṣads in the last sentence of the chapter, which states that the Upaniṣads' sentences should be contemplated.[489]

Parisaṅkhyāna, for Śaṅkara, does not amount to anything more than what he has explained with regard to the Upaniṣad sentences and *śravaṇa*. It is a contemplative repetition, presupposing that the practitioner is deeply engaged in the Advaita vision of reality, and is able to purposefully maintain that vision in the face of mental disturbances. Michael Comans notes that the primary distinction between *parisaṅkhyāna* and *prasaṅkhyāna* is that *parisaṅkhyāna* is practiced on self-knowledge that is already gained, whereas *prasaṅkhyāna* is designed to produce self-knowledge from repetition.[490]

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488 For example, see USG 19, 23, 24, 28, 31, 89-93, and 109.

489 "As duality does not exist, all the sentences of the Upaniṣads concerning non-duality of ātman should be fully contemplated, should be contemplated" (Mayeda 1992, p. 253).
ātmanaś ca advyatvaviṣayāṇi dvayasthāsattvāt yāni sarvāṇi upaniṣadvākyāni vistaraśaḥ samīkṣitavyāni samīkṣitavyānīti
Samīkṣitavyāni is repeated to signify the end of the chapter.

490 Comans 1988, p. 82.

Śaṅkara introduces the *parisaṅkhyāna* to neutralize mental affliction, yet the focus is on one's self-nature, not the objects which are sources of affliction. The point is not so much to dismiss or negate the objects of perception but to shift one's focus and orientation towards the self, a shift which automatically negates objects. Mental afflictions naturally cease to disturb the practitioner who makes this vision unshakeable. Through this practice a *mumukṣu* becomes established in his immediate recognition of *brahman* so that this knowledge is immediately available at all times.

Though again, how we characterize these different types of knowledge is problematic, for even in the case of *prasaṅkhyāna* in US chapter 18 there is some sort of conceptual knowledge that precedes the repetition of *prasaṅkhyāna*.

Chapter 5: The Process, Experience, and Function of *nididhyāsana*

5.1: Reconstructing the Process of *nididhyāsana*

The basic contemplative method outlined in BU, KU, BG, and US employs a process of withdrawing the mind from objects and in some sense "placing the mind on the *ātman*" to recognize non-duality. These contemplations move through particular conceptual directions that employ distinctions such as particulars and universals, subject and objects, dependency, causality, subtlety, purity, permanence, or pervasiveness. They lead the Advaitin to what is true, real, unchanging, and the ultimate source. The Upaniṣads repeat this process in numerous places. For example, BUbh 4.2.4 succinctly states, "Thus the sage identifies himself, by stages, with the vital force that comprises everything. Then withdrawing this all-comprising vital force into the inner self, he next attains the natural state of the witness, the transcendent self that is described as 'not this, not this.'"[491] Such a process is common to many Upaniṣadic teaching sections (*prakriyā*s) according to Advaita interpretations. With most *prakriyā*s, such as the analysis of the five sheaths (*pañcakośaviveka*) in TU 2.1-5 or the analysis of three states (*avasthātrayāviveka*) in MāU 1-7, practitioners have to move from looking externally to a deeper process leading to the direct recognition of *ātman*.

Despite the preceding discussions of the contemplative methods in the primary Advaita texts and Śaṅkara's commentaries, the process, practice, and experience of contemplation are still rather mysterious. I spent a number of extended periods at the

[491] Madhavananda 1993, p. 414.

Arsha Vidya Gurukulams, founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, in order to gain a clearer understanding of what contemplation entails. Swami Dayananda has been teaching Vedanta for over four decades and many of his students have taken vows of renunciation under his guidance.[492] *Saṃnyāsin*s (renunciates) at Arsha Vidya identify themselves as traditional Advaitins, particularly because of their close adherence to Advaita texts and the commentaries of Śaṅkara. They view their teaching and monastic tradition as an unbroken lineage going back to Śaṅkara.[493] Though allegiance is to Śaṅkara and teachers tend not to endorse Advaita's sub-schools, their views on contemplation fall more towards Sureśvara and Padmapāda rather than Maṇḍana and Vācaspati.

Dayananda has three *gurukulams* (centers for study), two in India, in Rishikesh and Coimbatore, and one in Pennsylvania.[494] These gurukulams offer short Ved ānta camps as well as long-term residential programs. Swami Dayananda himself or senior residential monks teach the courses. Classes are free of charge and are mostly taught in English in order to accommodate a diverse student body that includes both Indian and international students. The majority of students are well educated and many have

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492 He is not to be confused with Swami Dayananda of the Arya Samaj.

493 This lineage is rather complicated. Swami Dayananda was not trained within the Śaṅkara *Maṭhas*, though he has regular contact with the presiding Śaṅkarācāryas and appears to be accepted by them. He began his study of Vedānta with Swami Chinmayananda in 1952 and took his vows of *saṃnyāsa* from Swami Chinmayananda in 1962. However, he credits Swami Pranavananda, a teacher who lived in Gudivada, Andhra Pradesh, for teaching him how to understand the role of textual study as a means to liberation. Subsequently he trained extensively with Swami Taranandagiri of the Kailash Ashram in Rishikesh.

The emphasis on lineage is in terms of staying in line with the teaching method and content of Śaṅkara's commentaries. In other ways Arsha Vidya is rather liberal and unorthodox. For example, they teach in English, accept non-Indian students, and allow women to become renunciates (*saṃnyāsinī*s).

established professional careers. Many of the *saṃnyāsin*s in teaching roles had professional careers as doctors, engineers, computer programmers, or scientists. The *gurukulam*s have a large lecture hall, yoga studio, dining hall, residential quarters, and a temple dedicated to Śiva in the form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti.[495]

Dayananda emphasizes textual study, and this emphasis is reflected in Arsha Vidya's daily schedule. The average day consists of a morning contemplation session, followed by three Advaita Vedānta classes that analyze texts such as the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavadgītā,* and the *Brahmasūtra*s, a Pāṇinian Sanskrit grammar class, a Vedic chanting class, and a question and answer session in the evening. There are also temple rituals in the morning, afternoon, and evening, and an optional yoga class. There I discussed *nididhyāsana* and textual study with students and *saṃnyāsin*s and observed their classes and practices.

In the following chapter I attempt to reconstruct the basic method of *nididhyāsana*. This reconstruction makes use of my fieldwork with contemporary Advaitins, when specified, and the processes and difficulties they encounter in their own contemplative practice. I have also interwoven my own speculation based on the preceding chapter's textual analyses and extensive discussions with Advaita practitioners. In addition, the outline of the first half of this chapter is based on a set of verses found in Vidyāraṇya's *Dṛgdṛśyaviveka* that lay out a categorical interpretation of contemplation. My reconstruction is speculative, and perhaps bold, for it is impossible to know whether

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[494] The Pennsylvania location, set in Saylorsburg, a small town in the Pocono Mountains, is one of the few Vedānta retreat centers for traditional Advaita in the United States. It also functions as a cultural center for Indian families and Indian-American children.

my own speculation, or one particular lineage's interpretation of Śaṅkara, or a text composed long after Śaṅkara can accurately retrieve Śaṅkara's views. However, despite these limitations, I believe this reconstruction will help the reader gain insight into *nididhyāsana* outside of the enigmatic and formulaic confines of Upaniṣadic language and Śaṅkara's terse commentaries. The second half of the chapter returns to Śaṅkara's commentaries and explores the role of repetition (*āvṛtti*), the continuous flow of knowledge (*smṛti santati*), and the problem of injunctions (*vidhi*) in *nididhyāsana*.

Though the date of the *Dṛgdṛśyaviveka*'s composition, sometime in the 14th century, falls many centuries after Śaṅkara, it serves as a model for categorizing types of *nidididhyāsana*. It is also a rare example of a well-known Advaitin clearly and directly addressing contemplation. Vidyāraṇya uses the term *samādhi*, not *nididhyāsana,* in the *Dṛgdṛśyaviveka.* At first glance this is somewhat strange and forces us to question whether he understands *samādhi* as *nididhyāsana* or as a form of a non-dual experience similar to that found in Patañjali's Yoga. However, even though Vidyāraṇya's discussion, which uses the terms *savikalpa* (with division) and *nirvikalpa* (without division), appears to respect and parallel the conceptions of *samprajñāta* and *asamprajñāta samādhi* found in the *Yogasūtras*, I believe it unlikely that he is directly referring to Yoga's *samādhi*. Advaitins appropriated terms paralleling Yoga by Vidyāraṇya's time, but loaded them with concepts specific to Advaita.[496] As I will

[495] Dakṣiṇāmūrti (the deity who faces south) is Śiva in the form of a teacher. The Gurukulam in Rishikesh has a temple for Śiva as Gaṇgādhareśvara.

[496] In fact I believe it is incorrect to assume classical Yoga's ownership of the term *samādhi*. Various traditions used *samādhi* with their own specific meanings. For example, in the *Sangīti-sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (Rhys Davids 2002, p. 213) we even find a Buddhist distinction between *savitarka* and *nirvitarka*

explain in detail in the next chapter, Śaṅkara clearly rejects Yoga's *samādhi* as an experience lacking knowledge content.[497] In addition, Yoga's *samādhi* may lead to a non-dual state, but results in knowledge of the fundamental duality between awareness and matter, a duality antithetical to the Advaita program. I find it highly unlikely that a scholarly and orthodox Advaitin would identify *samādhi* as part of the path to understanding non-duality while equating it with Patañjali's conception. Furthermore, as I will argue, Śaṅkara himself identifies or reinterprets *samādhi* as *nididhyāsana* in numerous passages.[498] Therefore it is not unprecedented for a scholar such as Vidyāraṇya, who was deeply familiar with Śaṅkara's commentaries, to view *samādhi* and *nididhyāsana* as synonymous terms, and highly unlikely he viewed *samādhi* in the Yogic sense when aware of Śaṅkara's rejection of Yoga. The passages immediately preceding Vidyāraṇya's discussion of contemplation proceed along the lines of *anvaya* and *vyatireka*, showing that his contemplative *samādhi* depends on *śravaṇa*. Thus we can assume that Vidyāraṇya understands *samādhi* as *nididhyāsana* in the *Dṛgdṛśyaviveka*

Nididhyāsana is a single method that can take different forms. Vidyāraṇya divides *samādhi* or *nididhyāsana* into internal and external contemplation, contemplations that follow words or objects, and contemplations with distinction or without distinction:

> Having become indifferent to name and form and being devoted to *saccidānanda*, one should always practice concentration (*samādhi*) either within the heart or outside. (22)

(with thought and without thought) *samādhi*, a distinction that Patañjali also makes within *samprajñāta samādhi*. Such terminology had already spread by the composition of the *Yogasūtras* and probably predates the *Yogasūtra*s.

497 BSbh 2.1.9.

498 BGbh 2.39, 2.54, 4.38, 6.18, GKbh 3.37, BSbh 2.3.39.

Two kinds of *samādhi* to be practiced in the heart (within one's self) are known as *savikalpa* and *nirvikalpa*. *Savikalpa-samādhi* is again divided into two classes, according to its association with a cognizable object or a sound (as an object).(23)

Desire etc. centered in the mind are to be treated as (cognizable) objects. Meditate on consciousness as their witness. This is what is called *saviklpa-samādhi* associated with (cognizable) objects. (24)

I am existence-consciousness-bliss, unattached, self-luminous and free from duality. This is known as the (other kind of) *savikalpa-samādhi* associated with sound (object). (25)

But the *nirvikalpa-samādhi* is that in which the mind becomes steady like the (unflickering flame of a) light kept in a place free from wind and in which the student becomes indifferent to both objects and sounds on account of his complete absorption in the bliss of the realization of the self. (26)

The first kind of *samādhi* is possible with the help of any external object as it is with the help of an internal object. In that *samādhi* the name and form are separated from what is pure existence (Brahman). (27)

The entity which is (always) of the same nature and unlimited (by time, space, etc.) and which is characterized by existence-consciousness-bliss, is verily *brahman*. Such uninterrupted reflection is called the intermediate absorption, that is the *savikalpa-samadhi* associated with sound (object). (28)

The insensibility of the mind (to external objects) as before, on account of the experience of bliss, is designated as the third kind of *samādhi* (*nirvikalpa*). The practitioner should uninterruptedly spend his time in these six kinds of *samādhi*. (29)

With the disappearance of the attachment to the body and with the realization of the supreme self, to whatever object the mind is directed one experiences *samādhi*.(30)[499]

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[499] Nikhilandanda 1998, pp. 27-40.

5.1.1: External Contemplation

External contemplation focuses on external objects in order to discover *brahman*. Rather than simply ignoring objects as something other than the self, the objects are understood as *brahman*. This contemplation may take different forms, though in some sense they match Śaṅkara's usage of "withdrawing" or "pulling back" in the KU and BG discussed earlier. One can take up external objects in a process of concentrating on a higher object to exclude the lower particular object and move hierarchically towards larger universals and ultimately to the self. The student uses various ways based on some form of hierarchy in terms of causality, subtlety, purity, permanence or pervasiveness. However, in each case, the contemplative mind is pulling back towards *brahman* by means of mentally "dissolving" objects of knowledge into *brahman*, their ultimate substrate reality. This does not mean the world is actually dissolving or changing in the contemplator's experience. The world remains the same, but the contemplator progressively understands the world to be an appearance whose reality depends on *brahman*. These contemplations focus on the undifferentiated existence manifesting as objects, rather than the witnessing awareness as in the seer-seen contemplation explained below. Ultimately the process of withdrawing the mind is one that moves from seeing the object to understanding everything as universal non-dual existence which is *brahman*.

Perceiving any common object can exemplify the basic method of external contemplation. For example, when perceiving a clay pot, one sees a form identified with a corresponding name, and then recognizes that the pot exists and is perceived in awareness. However, though we assume that a real object must exist, when enquiring

into the existence of the object we cannot locate it in any form. The existence continues despite the changing form, but we cannot find that existence even if the form is reduced to smaller parts. This contemplation consists of rejecting mentally the name and forms of perceived objects and recognizing that their existence is nothing other than *brahman* and completely dependent on *brahman*. In this external meditation I refer to objects "outside" only with reference to the body. One's skin is the boundary delimiting internal and external. But external contemplation also refers to the mind. This is clear with the seer-seen analysis, for anything objectifiable is ultimately external to what is the most internal to the witnessing awareness (*sākṣin*). Therefore, the external contemplation also applies to the forms of the mind that one perceives internally and reduces to non-dual existence.

5.1.2: Internal Contemplation

Internal contemplation, which is more commonly known in Advaita parlance as the discrimination between the seer and the seen (*dṛg-dṛśya-viveka*), turns the Advaitin's mind towards the basis (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of thoughts. The explanations and the major *prakriyā*s in the Upaniṣads formulate a method of negating self-identities, progressively moving from external identities and moving inwards in terms of intimacy. One way of navigating this inward reflective process is through a contemplation based on the discrimination of subject and object, self and not-self, or between seer and seen. This contemplation is clearly used in the *parisaṅkhyāna* contemplation and is derived from Upaniṣadic passages such as the discussion of self-light in BU 4.3, the witness in *Keṇa*

Upaniṣad 1.2-8, *brahman* as *turīya* in *Māndukya Upaniṣad* 1.7, and the discrimination of the five sheaths in *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1-5.

Advaita accepts the fundamental logic that in perception there is a duality between subject and object. The subject must be other than the object, for it is illogical for the subject and object to share the same locus at the same time. Applying the subject/object duality to perception, one understands that whatever object is perceived is fundamentally separate from the perceiver. This is self-evident in the perception of external objects such as a table, for no sane person believes "I am the table that I perceive." However this wisdom collapses with regard to the body even though one perceives his or her body. The sensations of the body are intimately and directly known, connected with the mind, and assumed to be a part of oneself. In contemplating the dilemma of an intimately known yet objectified body, the student is reminded that the body changes yet his or her sense of self remains constant. There is some unchanging presence that is aware of the changing body. Furthermore even if a body part like an ear or an arm is lost, the self is not lost with it.[500] The same form of discriminating inquiry is then applied to the sense organs and the body's physiological processes. One is aware of the times when senses or processes such as respiration and digestion are not functioning properly. The next stage, after gaining proficiency with the negation of the body and sense organs as self, is inquiring into the mind as the self. In the seer-seen contemplation, the student finds that all categories and aspects of cognition, memory,

desire, mood, doubt and emotion are known as an object. Therefore the mind is also an object that is fundamentally different than the subject.

The process of *dṛgdṛśyaviveka* is specifically designed to decondition the student from longstanding identities and constructions of self, including relational ones that people deeply identify with, such as being a father, a son, a woman, a brahmana, or a Hindu. All of these, as well as those based on career, success, wealth, fame, ethnicity, nationalism, etc., are placed under the uncompromising magnifying class of *dṛgdṛśyaviveka*. As identities arises in the mind, the contemplator recognizes that they are objective constructs that are adventitious to the self and subsequently mentally dismisses them. In nullifying erroneous identities, the student steps outside of his or her culturally conditioned box towards the *ātman*, which has no relational points of reference. Advaitins do not consider this reconditioning, for it is a process of negation rather than a positive accumulation of identity.

This process of negation strips away the body, mind, and personal identity until only the subject, the true self identified with *ātman*, is left. The *ātman*, by definition, never exists as an object, but is the eternal witnessing awareness (*sākṣin*) according to the Advaita conception. When mind, body, and senses are removed, then there is no remaining instrument to make the subject an agent of action or knowledge. The *ahaṁkāra* (ego-sense), the locus of agency, is a function of the mind's reflection of

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[500] It is not clear how this can account for the loss of the brain, without which there would be no ego-sense or agent for knowing. But Śaṅkara believes awareness is aware of the mind, and thus aware of the brain also, and therefore distinct from the brain.

awareness. When the *ahaṁkara* is itself negated, then there is no locus for agency. Awareness itself is simply self-luminous and is not performing action.

One may argue that moving one's identity from the mind as *ahamkāra* to the *sākṣin* is a form of reconditioning; however this would misunderstand the nature of Advaita's *sākṣin*. The *sākṣin* is the primitive presence and locus of reflexive awareness constant throughout all experience, including the experience of the mind as oneself. *Dṛgdṛṣyaviveka* is not intended to introduce the *sākṣin* to the student as a new entity, but rather indicates what has always and necessarily existed as the subject. In the disassociation of identity, there is also a parallel deconstruction of cultural constructs. For those constructs require an identity as a locus to cling to. The process is to be viewed as negative rather then positive conditioning from the standpoint of Advaitins.[501] Through this process, the student is able to appreciate the mind as an object and also recognize that the true subject is nothing but pure awareness, which is none other than non-dual *brahman*.

5.1.3: "Catching" the Witness

The internal seer-seen contemplation leading to the witness appears to be straightforward and simple. The Advaitin who accepts the difference of subject and object should easily be able to negate everything that he or she objectifies. However, there is an increasing difficulty in separating the subject, as awareness, from objects in deeper levels of the contemplation that target subtle aspects of the mind, such as the

higher functioning intellect and the *ahaṁkāra*. The *ahaṁkāra* constitutes the deepest sense of self-identity and is most intimately superimposed with awareness. Understanding that the *ahaṁkāra* does not possess awareness is difficult. The mind must understand that the witness illumines it, not vice versa. Tackling the *ahaṁkāra* is especially difficult because the contemplative process itself requires the *ahaṁkāra* as some form of agency to engage in discrimination. The process of negating an identity or construction of self presupposes the *ahaṁkāra*. How can that *ahaṁkāra* use discrimination self-reflexively to negate itself? Attempting mentally to dismiss the *ahaṁkāra* may well lead to an infinite loop. After each attempt to negate the *ahaṁkāra* one recognizes that the *ahaṁkāra* itself was directing the process. The Advaitin must find some way to allow the *ahaṁkāra* to resolve by recognizing it as an appearance, which depends on *brahman* for its existence and awareness. This is not necessarily an experience where the *ahaṁkāra* is cancelled out and ceases to exist, but rather the direct recognition that the *ahaṁkāra* is only awareness. Yet who has this recognition and who maintains it afterwards? The paradox is that the *ahaṁkāra* must recognize itself as an appearance, leading to the negation of its identity as an independent entity. After this knowledge takes place the *ahaṁkāra* ought to continue functioning, aware of its reality and dependent nature.

The seer-seen contemplation presents an additional yet related dilemma to the thesis of the *ahaṁkāra*'s agency. How can one "catch" the witness and isolate

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[501] This is a view that offers an interesting perspective on current theories of mysticism that are divided into two broad groups of constructivism and essentialism. See Katz 1978, 2000, Proudfoot 1985, and

awareness? The *sākṣin* has a unique epistemological status, for even though it can never be objectified it remains as the self-evident subject. As the subject, it is immediately present as the locus and substratum of all knowledge and experience and is never unknown. At advanced stages of the contemplation, after exhaustively mentally negating objects and identities, the student may fall into a cat and mouse game of trying to catch the witness by attempting to objectify the witness with the intellect. This attempt requires awareness as its basis, and during the attempt, the mind is mistakenly trying to objectify awareness. With time the contemplator may recognize that this enterprise is hopeless because awareness is witnessing the mind's attempt to catch awareness. Awareness is independent of the attempt. According to the Advaitin conception, one cannot place the mind on *ātman* because the *ātman* is not located in any place. Furthermore the mind is an object of *ātman* and not vice versa.

Some of the Advaitin practitioners outlined at the beginning of this chapter informed me that there may be a persisting desire and tendency of the mind to find and objectify awareness even after clearly recognizing this conundrum in their contemplation. As each thought arises and falls in the mind, the fact that the thought is immediately illumined and known by awareness is self-evident. The immediacy of awareness appears tantalizingly close, tempting the mind to seek it. But when the mind again tries to turn towards awareness, then awareness slips away, remaining as though both behind and facing in the same direction as the mind. Immediately following that attempt, the contemplator recognizes the fact that awareness was present, self-evident, and the most

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Forman 1990 for some of the influential writings on these theories of mysticism.

intimate ground of experience during the attempt itself. The contemplator may feel as if awareness escaped the mind by a hair's breadth or the shortest of moments, and then he or she repeatedly tries again. Such an effort is premised on drawing a line dividing the seer and the seen. But it is not possible to draw this line. The student must recognize that every time he or she draws a line between seer and seen, both sides end up being the seen. This type of reflexive response is natural because the mind is conditioned to objectify. Yet in the case of the seer-seen inquiry the mind must let go of this fruitless pursuit and find an alternative way to recognize awareness without locating or objectifying awareness.

With *dṛgdṛśyaviveka,* one can quickly see through the projection of self-identities, but at the deeper levels of this process the student must be careful not to fall into a self-defeating cycle of "catching" the witness. When mistakenly attempting to objectify witnessing awareness, the mind can only turn towards a mental concept constructed or visualized from a preceding experience. This problem is inevitable in trying to grasp the awareness that made a prior cognition known. Looking for the witnessing awareness in the past is the inherent mistake of retrospectively examining an experience because awareness exists solely in the present. The *sākṣin* is illumining the very effort to understand awareness from a prior experience. The moment one tries to grasp awareness, the present moment becomes the past. From the standpoint of awareness, there is no past or future because awareness is not subject to time. It is eternally present. Memory itself takes place in the present as does conceiving the future.

Attempting to find awareness in the future is just as problematic as looking to the past, perhaps more so. A number of Advaita teachers informed me that the most difficult yet important reality to understand in contemplation is that the *ātman*, which the Upaniṣads point to, is my self right now. The *ātman* is not a conception of self or some event or experience occurring in the future. To look to the future is premised on something lacking in the present, yet this contradicts the very reality of the *ātman*. People take themselves for granted as limited and finite and have great difficulty breaking through this conditioned assumption, I am informed. They focus on what happened, what is changing, and what will happen. Therefore novice Advaitins tend to look towards a future event when they will become complete, gain knowledge, experience non-duality, or attain a state devoid of problems and insecurity. However, looking to the future occludes one's mind from recognizing awareness in the present. Understanding the *sākṣin* necessitates that the contemplator is immediately present and not looking to the past or future. This requires giving up the attempt to catch or grasp awareness.

Thoughts continuously move and change whether one is objectifying internal states or external objects. Awareness is constant and it illumines the rise of thoughts as well as their absence. The continuity of awareness with reference to thoughts and the changing mind and ego appear to be the key to recognizing the *sākṣin*. In deep contemplation, the Advaitin understands that despite the rise and fall of thoughts, different states, and changing mind and ego, there is a continuous presence of awareness. Though awareness is not isolated as an experience or object, it is isolated in terms of knowledge because the unchanging and self-luminous nature of awareness is self-evident.

I believe this occurs somehow when in the process of holding Upaniṣadic knowledge in mind while remaining in a unique place of total presence and dispelling the natural desire to apperceive the process happening, the contemplator recognizes the *sākṣin* as self-evident, the constant source of illumination which is not subject to the changing states of the mind. It is *brahman* and simply is. *Brahman* is not something that requires objectification or proof, for it trumps the very need for grasping, let alone proof, perception, inference, etc. There is an acknowledgement and comfort with the fact that one is awareness, without being able to grasp it. While this is a cognitive contemplative process, it is obviously not intended to be merely conceptual. It is a crucial reflexive method of inquiry that is unlike most forms of learning. One's self is always included in the inquiry.

5.1.4: Making The Equation

Internal and external contemplation are strikingly similar because they both employ the *anvaya* and *vyatireka* method. Both follow a method of finding either pure awareness or undifferentiated existence, while negating what is adventitious. The seer-seen inquiry finds awareness through a subject/object distinction, and the external contemplation finds existence though an analysis of objects and dependency (*mithyātva*). However, the contemplator faces a major dilemma. All objects and identities are supposed to be mentally discarded through *dṛgdṛśyaviveka* and one is left with the witness, the pure unobjectifiable subject. Yet the witness (*sākṣin*) is a subject relative to objects. The *sākṣin* is not to be circumscribed by constructed identities and is other than external objects, but its nature as other to things included in contemplation as not it leads

to a duality incompatible with non-duality. This conclusion however is more akin to Patañjali Yoga's isolation of awareness (*pūruṣa*), untouched and separate from any material or substance (*prakṛti*). When one comes to the conclusion that "I am the witness," then everything else becomes the non-self. Somewhere in the deepening contemplative process the Advaitin must understand that the *ātman* also includes all objects; however, this sets up a contemplative paradox. How does the contemplator recognize that on one hand pure awareness excludes all objects because objects fall outside of awareness's intrinsically subjective nature, yet on the other hand awareness includes all objects? How can I be the object if I am the subject?

External contemplation raises a similar dilemma. The recognition that universal existence underlies objects and is not limited to their name and form occurs within a dualistic framework. How is the existence evident in objects, not separate from them, identical with one's own awareness? At the most advanced stages of study and contemplation, the Advaitin must make a gradual transition or leap from internal to external or external to internal, in which all duality resolves. This is crucial, for the *ātman* is said to include and transcend all dichotomies such as subject and object. This transition is difficult because one cannot simply look at objects and name them as *ātman* or conceive of the *sākṣin* as all objects. Associating objects and *ātman* in this way is simply playing with concepts, a new level of superimposition and objectification that in fact leaves awareness out of the equation and is more like a form of *upāsanā*. The contemplative process must work at a deeper and more profound level to remove

ignorance of non-duality, rather than at a superficial level of constructing new identities and beliefs.

The impossibility of grasping the witness shows the student that one cannot locate one's self. Awareness is not located in or limited to the physical body. The dichotomy of inside and outside does not apply to awareness. Furthermore, awareness stands outside of time, always present in the immediate moment. Time is a constructed concept, a part of *māyā* that falls within awareness and is dependent on awareness. The same can be said for space. According to Śaṅkara, the dependence of space, time, and causality on awareness also negate any internal external distinction such as the difference between seer and seen. Nothing limits or conditions the *sākṣin*, leading to the knowledge that the same awareness is present in all things and not separate from non-dual existence.

The external contemplation focusing on thoughts and the seer-seen inquiry is to lead to recognition of the unity of awareness and existence. The self is wherever the mind is. Every thought arises from awareness, is illumined by awareness, sustained by awareness, and resolves back into awareness. Awareness is the locus for each cognition and constant throughout the process. As the locus of cognition, awareness is also the existence underlying each cognition. After cognition releases its content and disappears, awareness/existence does not disappear, but remains as the existence of one's self, the *sākṣin*.

This theory provides a method of contemplation that Śaṅkara specifically indicates in his commentary on the phrase, "(*brahman*) is known, being known with every thought, indeed one gains immortality" (KeU 2.4).[502] In the KeUbh 2.4. He writes:

> *Pratibodha-viditam* – known with reference to each state of intelligence. By the word *bodha* are meant the cognitions acquired through the intellect. The self, that encompasses all ideas as its objects, is known in relation to all these ideas. Being the witness of all cognitions, and by nature nothing but the power of consciousness, the self is indicated by the cognitions themselves, in the midst of cognitions as pervading them. There is no other door to its awareness. Therefore when *brahman* is known as the innermost self (i.e witness) of cognitions, then it is *matam*, known, that is to say, then there is its complete realization. Only by accepting *brahman* as the witness of all cognitions can it be established that it is by nature a witness that is not subject to growth and decay, and is eternal, pure in essence, the self, unconditioned, and one in all beings.[503]

He writes further in KeUbh 4.5:

> Though the mind goes, as it were, the mind enters into *brahman*, as it were, encompasses it as an object. And the fact that *anena*, by that mind; the spiritual aspirant; *abhīkṣṇam*, repeatedly; *upasmarati*, remembers intimately; *etat*, this *brahman*; and the *saṅkalpaḥ,* thought of the mind with regard to *brahman*. Since *brahman* has got the mind as its limiting adjunct, it seems to be revealed by such states of the mind as thought, memory, etc., by which it seems to be objectified. …in the context of the soul, it has the attribute of manifesting itself simultaneously with the states of the mind.[504]

Śaṅkara points out a fascinating method of contemplation here. The goal is to see all existence as one's self, and recognize that the witness exists equally in all things. One

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[502] *pratibodhaviditam matam amṛtatvam hi vindate* | KeU 2.4 (my translation).

[503] *pratibodhaviditaṁ bodhaṁ bodhaṁ prati viditam | bodhaśabdena baudhāḥ pratyayā ucyante | sarve pratyayā viṣayībhavanti yasya sa ātmā sarvabodhān pratibudhyate sarvapratyayadarśī | cicchaktisvarūpamātraḥ pratyayair eva pratyayeṣv aviśiṣṭayā lakṣyate; nānyad dvāram antarātmano vijñānāya | ataḥ pratyayapratyagātmatayā viditaṁ brahma yadā tadā tat mataṁ tatsamyagdarśanam ity arthaḥ sarvapratyayadarśitve copajananāpāyavarjitadṛksvarūpatā nityatvaṁ viśudhasvarūpatvam ātmatvaṁ nirviśeṣataikatvaṁ ca sarvabhūteṣu siddhaṁ bhavet |* (my translation).

[504] Gambhirananda 1995, p. 86.

can allow the mind to run where it wants. Wherever it goes, whether to internal thoughts or external objects, one sees the self. In this contemplation there is no effort to place the mind on *brahman*, but rather an unobjectifying recognition of *brahman* which does not require a particular thought of *brahman*. Through this knowledge one cannot but see *brahman* wherever the mind wanders because the contemplator immediately recognizes that awareness is underlying the cognition of the object.

This ostensibly requires a high degree of mental alertness, perhaps something similar to the Buddhist's mindfulness contemplation (*vipaśyanā*). The Advaitin must be intentionally aware and remind himself that each arising thought points back to the awareness illuminating the thought. Even if the mind wanders from object to object, it is really not wandering for there is a continuous intentional and occurrent recognition of awareness. Here we must make a clear distinction between a mind wandering within the contemplation and a mind truly distracted and unaware of the contemplation. In this contemplation the mind is certainly not wandering in a distracted way for the contemplator cannot lose sight of his purpose and must remain vigilant in the midst of the wandering mind. One can even turn the distractions of the mind into a contemplative aid, for every thought indicates the awareness illuminating it. One can welcome distractions by negating them and returning to the locus of awareness. With this process, the objects, along with the emotions that are associated with them, such as *rāga* (like), *dveṣa* (dislike), *śoka* (grief), and *krodha* (anger), cease to disturb the contemplator because the contemplator leans to transform such distractions into contemplative aids.

This contemplation may be compared to standing in a house of mirrors, where the infinite reflections, like the infinite objects one perceives, point back to the single self. Another excellent example is a lucid dream. In a lucid dream, where one remains in the dream world but is aware it is a dream, one sees the dream objects but is absolutely clear that all dream objects are not separate from his or her mind despite the appearance of subject-object duality. If the lucid dreamer holds this knowledge in awareness, then the dream objects he or she perceives point back to the underlying reality of the mind. There is no ultimate difference between the dream object and dream individual. From this perspective there is no necessity to isolate *brahman* or experientially "negate" the world. Perceiving duality is not the destruction of non-duality because the contemplator recognizes the dependence of duality on awareness.

Knowledge of external objects takes place through cognition in the mind. Objects exist (*asti*), are known (*bhāti*), and possess name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*). In external contemplation the Advaitin may take up an object like a pot and look at the word "pot" and its meaning, a pot shaped form of clay. Then he or she mentally discards the name and form, and analyzes the substance, "clay", and its meaning, a substance having a shape and formed of minerals. Then the analysis shifts to minerals. The process of seeking the ultimate existence of any object is endless, as every substance and form is infinitely divisible. This leads to a position that name and form are adventitious, constantly shifting on the constant ground of existence.

At this point Advaitins make a staggering metaphysical transition in their contemplation by identifying existence and awareness. Advaitins claim that the universal

existence that they arrive at through dismissing names and forms, which has no boundaries or limitations, is identical with one's own existence. If existence is not limited by name and form, what is there to separate the existence of one's self from the existence we conceive as inherent to another person or another object? The same can be said for awareness. If awareness is unobjectifiable, self-luminous, uncaused, and without boundaries, what can separate it from universal existence? Or how can we make a distinction between two awarenesses? According to the Advaitin, it is only in awareness that we can recognize unchanging existence. This is why it is no surprise that wherever there is awareness there is also existence, and wherever we perceive something that exists there is also awareness. They identify self-existence with self-luminous awareness, thus equating all unqualified existence with one's witnessing awareness.

The theory of identity between unqualified awareness and existence is difficult for the Advaitin to defend. However, though later Advaitins do formulate sophisticated arguments to support the identity of awareness and existence, we must remember that ultimately Śaṅkara takes recourse to the Upaniṣads to justify his position. Knowledge of non-duality is not arrived at by dry logic and therefore, even though supporting arguments may be made, ultimately it is not a thesis established by logic. This is one reason the Upaniṣads must function as a source of knowledge. Advaitins take Upaniṣads at their word and understand them to be more powerful as a knowledge-generator than any philosophical challenge. Furthermore, direct recognition of the identity of existence and awareness occurring as *brahmvidyā* is not conceivable according to the Advaita

conception. It is a unique, direct, and universal recognition of *brahman* unlike modal cognition or psychological states, which cannot include everything within its scope.

The "am-ness", the awareness and existence underlying every cognition is the same "is-ness" available with every object. Or one could also say unqualified "known-ness" and "is-ness" are not separate in the Advaita view. Neither one ever changes, deviates, is qualified by names or forms, or is subject to limitations. The contemplator recognizes that pure non-dual existence comprises all objects and that same non-dual existence is his or her self. This is not intended to be a conflation of thought and reality where the existence of an external object depends on my thought. Advaita recognizes a difference between mind and object, and in fact defends realism. The key to understand the Advaita position is to remember that awareness is other than the mind and transcends the mind. Even though existence is identified with awareness, awareness is not dependent on or identified solely as the finite mind. Both mind and object share the same level of reality, equally dependent on awareness, which is non-dual.

5.1.5: Contemplation Following Words (*śabdānuvidha nididhyāsana*)

The internal and external contemplations outlined above focus on seen objects (*dṛśya-anuvidha*) whether in terms of moving internally through the seer-seen contemplation or externally by understanding *brahman* as the locus (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of objects. One question that comes up here is the role of the *mahāvākya*s. How do Advaitins employ such sentences in contemplation? Does understanding *mahāvākya*s function differently from contemplation or in some unique manner? Vidyāraṇya's *Dṛgdṛśyaviveka* divides contemplation into different categories, first internal and external

and then two more categories of those that follow objects and those that follow words. I don't believe Śaṅkara specifically makes a distinction between contemplations that follow words (*śabdānuvidha*) and those that follow seen objects (*dṛśyānuvidha*). In some ways it is difficult to make this division because contemplating a *mahāvākya* does not refer to the mention of the words or simply repeating a *mantra* as in *japa*, but seeing their meanings and the unified meaning of the complete sentence. As I will show, contemplating the meaning of the great sentences (*mahāvākyāni)* is more or less the same as contemplating the equation of existence and awareness made in internal and external contemplation.

Contemplation following sentences is only possible after listening to the Upaniṣads taught properly by a qualified teacher. Only then does the contemplator understand how to move beyond the direct meanings of the words to the implied ones that point to the self. The sentences function to bring the contemplator back to his or her self, revealing the nature (*svarūpa*) of *ātman* through secondary indication (*lakṣaṇā*). So too is *anvaya* and *vyatireka* (continuity and discontinuity) and *neti neti* (negation) implicit to the contemplations detailed earlier, for such contemplations depend on a process of mentally dismissing adventitious properties such as name and form in order to arrive at what is constant, continuous, and unchanging. It is simple to see that these contemplations lead one through the same process of understanding the *mahāvākya*. The internal and external contemplations mirror the *mahāvākya, tat tvam asi* ("You are that"). The internal attempts to find *tvam* and the external attempts to find *tat*. The contemplation then equates both sides.

These contemplations, in whatever form, achieve a form of "yoking" through knowledge (thus the use of terms such as *yuñjan* in BG 6.28). The fundamental process of *nididhyāsana* ultimately depends on knowledge content. The knowledge content of larger teaching sections (*prakriyā*s) in the Upaniṣads, such as the *pañcakośa* in TU or the *avasthātraya* in MāU, is the same as the *mahāvākya*s according to Śaṅkara's interpretation. The process of understanding the meaning of the sentence requires contemplative means such as withdrawing the mind, the seer-seen inquiry, reducing names and forms to existence, etc. However, one might argue that an initial understanding of the sentence, even if only conceptual, is helpful to structure *nididhyāsana*.

Many Advaitins I interviewed consider *śabdānuvidha nididhyāsana* an advanced part of the Advaita path, consisting of abiding in and staying with the sentence meaning after understanding the equation of *tat* and *tvam*. This advanced contemplation, of repeating or abiding in one's knowledge of non-duality, whether direct *brahmvidyā* or some form of deficient self-knowledge due to obstacles, is not essentially different from the culmination of the internal/external contemplation because both arrive at *brahmavidyā* or alternatively, continue to repeat one's *brahmavidyā*. However, at the outset it is somewhat different in that it intentionally makes use of a sentence rather than seen objects. The Advaitin may favor contemplating the sentence because it provides the simplest structure that encapsulates and leads one through larger Upaniṣadic *prakriyā*s. Both the *mahāvākya* and the *prakriyā*s move through a process of *anvaya* and *vyatireka*, though the *prakriyā*s do so in more detail and from a particular conceptual angle. The

pithiness of the *mahāvākya* also makes it a convenient device to encapsulate the entire Advaita teaching. At the advanced level the contemplator does not require multiple contemplative steps to work through Advaita concepts and eventually arrive at unity. It may be more efficient for him to use the sentence as a trigger that retrieves the knowledge, whether deep intellectual insight or direct *brahmavidyā*, that he has cultivated over years of intensive study.

The contemplator may engage a variety of sentences for *nididhyāsana* such as "I am complete" (*pūrṇo 'ham*),[505] "I am infinite" (*ananto 'ham*),[506] "I am unattached" (*asaṅgo 'ham*),[507] "I am *brahman*" (*aham brahmāsmi*),[508] etc. In a sense, these sentences direct one towards internal contemplation because they refer to oneself. The student may also use sentences that directs one towards external contemplation, such as "*Brahman* is truth, knowledge, limitless" (*satyam jṇānam anantam brahma*), "All this is *brahman* (*sarvam idam brahma*), or "*Brahman* is partless (*akhaṇḍam brahma*), etc. All have the same fundamental meaning, which asserts one's identity with *brahman*; however, the student may fluidly employ different sentences to target different emotional obstacles. For example, if one's sense of insecurity disturbs one's deficient understanding of *brahman*, then the teacher may recommend using the sentence "I am complete." If one's desires are problematic, then the student may use "I am unattached." The entire Advaita vision is anchored into the sentence and the sentence is believed to trigger immediate

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505 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 5.1.
506 *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1.
507 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.15.
508 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10

knowledge of non-duality when engaged by mental repetition and when the student has achieved the proper fitness for *brahmavidyā* through mental purification.

The focus interviewees at the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam place on *mahāvākya*s in *nididhyāsana* reiterates Śaṅkara's emphasis on the Upaniṣads. Contemplation cannot be reduced to an independent intellectual endeavor or some form of additional practice. Implicit to contemplating the sentences is a surrendering to the teaching of the Upaniṣads as well as the guru as an authority that conveys liberating knowledge. Implicit in the idea of surrendering is a reworking of how students understand the Upaniṣads and the teacher. They must not only accept the Upaniṣads as the ultimate authority for self-knowledge, but also recognize the teacher as that authentic voice, whose words are sacred and transformative. The teacher is a mouth of the tradition and a manifestation of the Upaniṣads because he or she has gained complete infallible self-knowledge (*brahmaniṣṭha*) and is able to communicate that knowledge (*śrotriya*).

A few *saṃnyāsin*s at Arsha Vidya reported to me that novice students need to change their orientation radically away from viewing contemplation as an independent practice for knowledge. Instead, they must recognize the words of the texts as the source and means of liberation and base their contemplation on the intrinsic power the texts have for conferring knowledge. These sentences meanings possess active agency for revealing non-duality. The student must make some effort to direct his or her mind to engage the sentences in listening or contemplation,[509] and then allow the sentences to do their work. This is a natural relaxation into the texts and teacher, often described as "surrendering to

the *pramāṇa*" and allowing oneself to become an open and passive recipient of textual knowledge. From this perspective, the sentences themselves, when taught through the speech of a teacher and subsequently contemplated, are capable of knocking off one's self-ignorance. When dwelling on the meaning of the sentence in *nididhyāsana* the student must step out of the way and allow the sentences to do their magic.

A couple of *saṃnyāsin*s reported to me their own struggle to adopt an orientation of surrendering to the texts in their contemplation. They recognized that their minds created resistance, a screen of their own ideas and concepts that acted as a filter and obstructed absorption of the Advaita teachings. When they were young students, they required considerable effort in contemplation to extract the meaning from the sentences. The words did not penetrate deeply and doubts or confusion would pop up. Yet as they continued to study and gained clarity, their experience of contemplation changed significantly. Their minds became increasingly passive, and they recognized that in reality the words are doing all the work. This transition from mental effort to relaxing, cultivating textual receptivity, and allowing the words to become active was a major turning point in their contemplative practice. They reported that the great difficulty in allowing the words to become effective was having the courage to let go of their resistance to the words and cultivate a more receptive attitude.

The capacity to dwell on the final conclusion of the sentence and see the meaning clearly in *śabdānuvidha nididhyāsana* appears to be an advanced stage of the study process. No new knowledge is created through the contemplation. The student maintains

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509 This refers to the *tavya* suffix in *nididhyāsitavyaḥ* (BU 2.4.5).

a repeated repetition of textual knowledge produced from listening, though it is not actively listening nor does it require effort to consider the meanings of words. . Otherwise he or she requires more *śravaṇa* and *manana*. At this point the student easily surrenders to the meaning of the sentence and appreciates it. The mind relinquishes its resistance to the sentence meaning and understands that it is illumined by the *ātman*. Contemplation may occur spontaneously at this point because the mind, having recognized its reality as *brahman* without limitations and complete, naturally desires to stay with this recognition.

Some *saṃnyāsin*s at Arsha Vidya reported that repeating the sentence meaning is only the starting point. In moving through the contemplative process and eventually clearly recognizing the meaning of the sentences there is no more action. As their contemplation gains maturity, the words act like a mirror to see oneself. They let go of any attempt to objectify self-knowledge or to use will power and effort, and recognize that there is no separation between self, *brahman*, and the meaning of the *mahāvākya*. Here there is no more action because there is no agency. According to their theologically informed descriptions, the cognition created by the sentence appears to resolve into its own meaning because the object of the sentence is oneself. Subject/object dualities such as contemplator and contemplated or listener and object of listening are eliminated in the process of contemplation. At this point, the contemplator is not simply dwelling on the knowledge or abiding in it, but is the very knowledge itself. The identification of self-knowledge and individual points to the problem of misleading phrases such as "remaining, residing, or abiding in knowledge" or "being absorbed in knowledge."

Advaitins must understand these phrases as purely metaphorical, according to my informants.

5.1.6: Words as Contemplative Grammar

Śaṅkara does not specify how contemplation is to be done as clearly as we would like. However, it is clear that the meanings of the *mahāvākyas* themselves, or when dilated as larger *prakriyās* or in the form of external or internal contemplation, are both the entry points and the content of *nididhyāsana*. The crucial aspect to be aware of is that the method(s) of continuity and discontinuity (*anvaya-vyatireka*), negation (*neti neti*), and indirect implication (*lakṣaṇā*) discussed earlier in chapter three, is the intrinsic keys within the *mahāvākyas* and larger *prakriyā*s that unlock the sentence meaning and reveal self-knowledge. A translation of the sentence is inadequate. One first requires listening to a capable teacher who employs these verbal methods to unfold the sentence meaning. The sentence meaning then forms the content of *nididhyāsana*, and *anvaya-vyatireka* constitutes the method and contemplative grammar that enables *nididhyāsana*. Thus *nididhyāsana* possesses a deep structure and content composed of the meaning of the Upaniṣad sentences. It cannot be separated from the Upaniṣads or possess any function independent of them.[510]

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[510] This theory goes back to Śaṅkara's refutation of action and practices such as the *prasaṅkhyāna* contemplation (US chapter 18) that emphasize meditative action, and his emphasis on upholding the authority of the Upaniṣads. Otherwise *nididhyāsana* would be elevated to an independent source of knowledge. In BUbh 1.4.7 Śaṅkara writes that contemplation does not create any new special state of knowledge separate from textual knowledge and arises naturally from texts. From this standpoint it is clear that *nididhyāsanam* is a mode of *śravaṇa* and is completely dependent on the hearing of the Upaniṣads. Also see BUbh 2.5.1 for *nididhyāsana* being in accordance with *śravaṇa* and *manana*. However, Advaitins such as those in the Bhāmatī school do not agree with this view and they emphasize *nididhyāsana* and claim *śravaṇa* and *manana* are modes of *nididhyāsana*.

Recall also that according to Śaṅkara's conception, *nididhyāsana* is not a will based process of mechanical repetition because such practices fall into the problematic category of actions. Rather it is a allowing the *pramāṇa*, in the form of the sentence meaning, to convey *brahmavidyā*, a process that requires total receptivity and a high degree of mental purification. We do not know how to characterize the knowledge being contemplated at least at the early stages of *nididhyāsana*. Some Advaitins, such as Maṇḍana Miśra and Vācaspati Miśra, may claim it is propositional and indirect knowledge. Others, such as Sureśvara, Padmapāda, and Madhusūdhana Saraswati may claim it is direct non-propositional self-knowledge throughout the process. However, at some point after the student has gained clarity and stability in knowledge (*jñānaniṣṭha*) through *nididhyāsana*, then he ought to be able to continuously recognize and contemplate direct *brahmvidyā* with total clarity (*niścayena dhyānam*). Throughout this contemplative process the student is engaging the meaning of the sentences through *lakṣaṇā, anvaya-vyatireka*, and *neti neti*, however the student is not doing this in a step by step process, but rather recognizing the reality of his self as non-dual in a continuous stream of cognitions (*smṛti santāna*). The methods remain as a transparent structure supporting contemplation and continually providing its content. From this standpoint it is clear that *nididhyāsana* is a mode of *śravaṇa* and is dependent on the teaching of the Upaniṣads. But what Advaitins really mean by dependence on the Upaniṣads is not the words themselves, but their meaning and the verbal methods necessary to convey that meaning.

Unfortunately, the contemplator's approach to the sentences in *nididhyāsana* is not always clear. In the beginning does one just mull over the words and their meanings? Does one think of them like a math problem, like a zen koan, or hold them in mind in some creative way? The process is surely not like learning other bodies of knowledge. There is a clear difference between studying Advaita as a theory and changing one's orientation to see oneself in the words and explanation of the teacher. This type of inquiry has an inward direction even though it makes use of formal methods like *anvaya* and *vyatireka*. However, we can only speculate on the phenomenological process.

The transparency of *nididhyāsana's* grammar and structure is analogous to language fluency. When we begin learning a language as an adult we first learn vocabulary, grammar, and sentence composition, and then carefully compose sentences with such rules in mind. Eventually, with language fluency, we drop the grammar as part of the active mental process. This is not to say that grammar is absent from our speech, but that it becomes effortless, spontaneous, and transparent. It is the structure of speech and fully present, yet absent in our effort and not visible in our minds as we speak. It is only visible in retrospect if we look back upon our sentences and analyze their structure. Advaita's language method is present during *nididhyāsana* in a similar manner, but at a mature level of contemplation it becomes a transparent and effortless grammar.[511] In the case of Advaita, the language methods constitute the structure of contemplation and provide the content as well.

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[511] How far can we use language as an analogy for *nididhyāsana*? Language is highly structured and governed by rules. It is uniform and a rule governed code shared by people. This is limited but gives us a

5.2: Repetition (*āvṛtti*)

Repetition is an intrinsic aspect of *nidididhyāsana*, though it does not always fit clearly into Śaṅkara's Advaita. Repetition is explicit to contemplative descriptions such as "bringing the mind back to the self" and "remaining in the self" as well as contemplative terms such as *abhyāsa* (continuous practice), [512] *anusmaraṇa* (remembering), [513] *anucintana* (thinking of the self), [514] *smṛti santati* (continuous flow of memory) [515] and *āvṛtti* (repetition). [516] The importance of repetition is evident in the teaching of various Upaniṣads, which often repeat phrases and ideas in a particular passage or text. Concepts and verses are often repeated verbatim in different Upaniṣads. The Upaniṣads use repetition as a teaching method within narratives between teacher and student. For example, Uddālaka repeats and explains *tat tvam asi* nine times to Śvetaketu in *Chāndoyga Upaniṣad* chapter 6.

A natural question that arises in Miṁāmsā hermeneutics is how to justify such repetition. Repetition appears to be redundant when the Upaniṣad provides the same information elsewhere. This is a serious issue because according to Mīmāṁsā hermeneutics, redundancy is a flaw that potentially negates the validity of the Upaniṣads. Some Mīmāṃsakas might claim repetition of sentences like *tat tvam asi* or *neti neti* is

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good model and gives us an idealized account of *nididhyāsana*. Though we have to assume individuals and their context bring a lot more complexity to this process.

[512]BG 6.35, 8.8, 12.9. See Gkbh 3.31 for *viveka-darśana-abhyāsa*, a phrase similarly used in YSbh 1.12.

[513] BG 8.9, GKbh 3.43.

[514] BG 8.8.

[515] BU 1.4.7, 1.4.10.

[516] BS 4.1.1.

simply eulogistic (*arthavāda*), but this is unacceptable to Śaṅkara.[517] Śaṅkara believes that sentences such as *tat tvam asi* are not *arthavāda* and provide direct knowledge of *brahman*. Śaṅkara also makes use of repetition (*abhyāsa*) as part of the *ṣaḍliṅga vicāra*, a six-fold exegetical strategy necessary in order to understand scriptural meaning during *śravaṇa*.[518] Furthermore, According to Śaṅkara, repetition is necessary for a student who has difficulty grasping non-duality, and is employed to remove fresh doubts and other obstructions to *brahmavidyā*.[519] The same subject is expounded repeatedly, sometimes with unique and subtle nuances, to counter whatever new doubt arises for the student.

Śaṅkara raises a significant discussion about repetition and *nididhyāsana* in his commentary on the first two *sūtra*s of the fourth chapter of the *Brahmasūtra*s. These two *sūtra*s follow a discussion of *nididhyāsana* at the end of the third chapter. BS 4.1.1 states "Repetition (is necessary) because the teaching (of the Upaniṣads is given) multiple times."[520] In his introduction to this *sūtra* Śaṅkara specifically raises doubts with reference to the root passage for *nididhyāsana* (BU 2.4.5) as well as the related passages BU 4.4.21 and CU 8.7.1. The question is whether one should do the mental act once or repeat it. There is a concrete need for clarification. This question is critical for understanding Advaita praxis, and the Vedic statements in question are centrally important. An opponent answers, claiming that one should repeat only once, for that fulfills the action, just as one should repeat a ritual enjoined by the Veda only once. One

517 This I had explained earlier in chapter two.
518 See *Vedāntasāra* chapter 5, particularly verse 185 for an explanation.
519 See BSbh 3.3.36, US 1.2, and BGbh 4.18.
520 *āvṛttir asakṛd upadeśāt* (BS 4.1.1)

should do an act only as many times as the scripture enjoins it. Repetition may be permissible if there is a visible result; but if the result is not visible, then even if one repeats the action he cannot say how many times to repeat; so it is better to say there is no repetition and just perform it once.

In reply, Śaṅkara explains that the repetition in the sentence indicates a repetition of the mental action is to be done. He further takes a pragmatic stand, explaining that *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* culminate in self-knowledge (*darśana*).[521] They must be repeated until their goal of *brahmavidyā* is recognized. Repetition would be useless if knowledge of *brahman* is never direct, unseen, and not an immediate result. Repetition in the triple process is analogous to the repetitive action required for husking rice. Śaṅkara specifically singles out *nididhyāsana* for this repetition and draws a parallel to *upāsanā*. Even though *nididhyāsana* and *upāsanā* are fundamentally different, they both involve the same type of continuous repetition. The Advaitin in *nididhyāsana* continuously thinks of *brahman* just as a student adores his teacher or a woman constantly thinks of her departed husband. In concluding the *sūtra* commentary, Śaṅkara states that repetition is clearly established when the instruction is repeated,[522] but even if spoken only once; repetition is necessary until the purpose is fulfilled.

[521] We must keep in mind that this is not an "act" in the usual sense of *karma*, nor is it creating something truly new as a result (*phala*). It is object-dependent (*vastu tantra*) and *mokṣa* is already gained.
[522] As in the sentences directing one to do *nididhyāsana*, such as BU 2.4.5, BU 4.4.21, and CU 8.7.1.

In the following *sūtra,* "Because of the meaning" (*liṅgāc ca*),[523] Śaṅkara again explains that repetition of the cognition is established and then continues his discussion with a number of new objections. What purpose can there be in repeating a cognition about *brahman*? Repeating a cognition is not like repetition of an activity which establishes some result. And if listening to a sentence such as *tat tvam asi* does not generate knowledge the first time, then why will repetition be productive? Repeating something not understood will not result in direct non-propositional knowledge. One may argue in response that when first learning something, one only receives general knowledge of the subject, but repetition is necessary to understand the specifics and to gain intimate knowledge. The opponent refutes this also, claiming that repetition of general knowledge (*sāmānya*) will not give specific knowledge (*viśeṣa*), even if repeated a hundred times. Furthermore, this argument can only work with empirical examples that have universal (*sāmāṇya*) and particular (*viśeṣa*) characteristics. If the Advaitin says *brahman* has no attributes, then there is no possibility of gaining particular knowledge through repetition. This objection points to a fundamental issue. *Upāsanā* may be repeated because it targets only *brahman* with attributes. How is there any possibility of contemplating unqualified *brahman*? And how can such repetition either produce *brahmavidyā* or make one's *brahmavidyā* clearer and free from obstruction? These objections strike to the heart of some crucial and potentially contradictory aspects of

[523] The translation of *liṅga* as "indicatory mark" may be more of a Nyāya translation rather than a Mīmāṁsā one. I take it as "meaning" (*śabda-artha-liṅga*). It could either be the verbal import or the inherent nature of the object. Verbal import is better because the context is Vedic injunctions.

nididhyāsana. They bring into question the validity of Advaita's theory of verbal knowledge and the whole contemplative process.[524]

Śaṅkara dismisses these objections. He recognizes that students struggle to gain *brahmavidyā* and thus accepts the need for repetition. Ideally, a properly qualified student will immediately gain *brahmavidyā* upon listening to a teacher skillfully unfold a *mahāvākya*. But listening alone may be insufficient. Śaṅkara first draws our attention to the fact that repetition is common in the Upaniṣads, like Śvetaketu's repeated request to understand *tat tvam asi*. He then takes recourse to common experience where we find that a sentence vaguely apprehended is clearly understood only after removing the causes of doubt. The sentence *tat tvam asi* cannot reveal its meaning when it is obstructed by ignorance, doubt, and confusion. A person must progressively understand the terms *tvam* and *tat* by negating what they are not and removing false superimpositions. Each attempt at understanding the sentence negates different falsities, doubts, and misconceptions, facilitating a progressive clarification of self-knowledge.[525] Śaṅkara resolves the initial doubt, showing that repetition is not to clarify *sāmānya* to *viśeṣa*, but to remove various obstructions and doubts. The self is partless, but there are various superimpositions that have to be seen through.[526] The contemplative process is not geared towards any objectification of *brahman* but a negation of the variegated superimpositions of self-identity that individuals cling to. Repetition does not clarify *brahman's* attributes but

[524] This issue did not go unnoticed by other traditions. See Vedāntadeśika's *Tattvamuktākalāpa* 2.45-50 for a Viśiṣṭādvaita critique (Chari 1988, pp. 289-295).
[525] Also see KeUbh. 2.1 and BSbh 3.3.37.
[526] This refers to *neti neti*. See my earlier section on this, as well as BS 3.2.2 and BS 3.3.36.

removes doubts and other obstacles. Once again we see Advaita's negative epistemology as a way of resolving difficulties.

The gradual process of study through repetition points to the difference between simple confusion and a deep-rooted problematic orientation. One can quickly solve confusion due to a basic intellectual error without requiring repetition. Further repetition is sensible when confusion is not merely intellectual but deeply rooted in terms of outlook and desires, and has caused life long habitual errors in self-identity. However, Śaṅkara still insists that a rare person of sharp intellect, who possesses the qualifications for *brahmavidyā*, can understand *tat tvam asi* upon hearing it once. This points to the fact that the necessity of repetition is not intrinsic to the teaching of the Upaniṣads. A requirement for repetition points to limitations of the practitioner, not to any limitation of the Upaniṣads. It is clear that *adhikāra* is the pivotal factor playing into repetition.

In concluding his commentary on this *sūtra,* Śaṅkara reinforces the importance of the guidance of the *mahāvākya* throughout the process, emphasizing that in repetition the contemplator should fix his or her mind on the meaning of the sentence.[527] It is also clear that Śaṅkara is not recommending mechanical repetition or some type of *mantra japa*. Repetition is to function at various levels through *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana*. Repeated listening resolves doubts about the means of knowledge (*pramāṇaśaṅkā*s) and repeated reflection satisfies intellectual doubts (*prameyaśaṅkā*s) about one's identity as *brahman*; however, the student may require repeated contemplation if listening and

[527] Also see BSbh 3.3.37.

reflection are insufficient to bring deep self-knowledge.[528] The primary function of repeated contemplation is the neutralization of obstacles immune to listening and reflection, namely contradictory habitual thinking patterns (*viparītabhāvanā*) that involve affective investment.

5.3: The Continuous Flow of Knowledge (*smṛti-santati*)

According to Śaṅkara, the repetition within *nididhyāsana* takes the special form of a flow of continued memory of verbal knowledge.[529] An understanding of identity of self and *brahman* is repeated, creating a uniform and continuous cognition of non-duality, to the exclusion of all other thoughts; however, as I have repeated, Śaṅkara does not clarify if the repeated knowledge is propositional knowledge without doubts or direct and immediate *brahmavidyā*. The *smṛti santati* is a process of continuously appreciating the fact of non-duality. Though the continuous flow, compared to a constant flow of poured oil, is a phrase used synonymously for meditation, *upāsanā*, and *nididhyāsana*, its nature is fundamentally different in *nididhyāsana* because *nididhyāsana* depends on self-knowledge gained from the Upaniṣads. I intentionally interpret *smṛti* as knowledge here rather than memory because *nididhyāsana* is an active and present appreciation of self-evident and immediate truth. Memory entails calling to mind a distant or mediate object, which exists for the individual as a memory but is not anymore available for a

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[528] See BUbh 2.4.5: "When these (three) are approached (combined) as one, then correct understanding of the oneness of *brahman* becomes clear, not otherwise by listening alone" (my translation).
yadā ekatvam etāny upagatāni tadā samyagdarśanaṃ brahmaikatvaviṣayaṃ prasīdati, na anyathā śravaṇamātreṇa

[529] *ātmavijñānasmṛtisaṃtati*. See BU 1.4.7, 1.4.10; BG 12.3, 13.24, 18.50, 18.55; PU 5.1; BS 4.1.8. The term *smṛti* (memory) refers to one's understanding of the *mahāvākya*.

functioning means of knowledge. Even if initial understanding of the sentence occurred in the past, repetition of the sentence meaning is a continuously valid cognition, which continuously re-cognizes the immediate and always present self. On the other hand, there is a sense of memory in *nididhyāsana* because it runs through the structure of the *mahāvākya* gained through previous *śravaṇa*. The knowledge *vṛtti* is created by the *mahāvākya*, which destroys self-ignorance. In *nididhyāsana* the contemplator strengthens the *vṛtti* born from the *mahāvākya*, continuously enlivening it over and over again and removing any habitual contradictory patterns of thought and emotion. In a way this is akin to memory because no new knowledge is taking place. Yet it is completely different because there is only the immediate self-luminous *ātman* present in contemplation.

In the situation where one's self-knowledge is deficient and disturbed by habitual tendencies, the student must make a concerted effort to maintain *nididhyāsana*. However, Śaṅkara states that this continuous repetition of knowledge is a natural progression that arises spontaneously and invariably from studying the texts, and thus does not need to be enjoined.[530] *Brahmavidyā* removes contradicting emotions and affective states, such as sorrow or fear, which are derived from a false sense of self. This immediate self-knowledge is more powerful than knowledge of the non-self. In this situation the Advaitin's mind automatically holds a continuous flow of memory regarding the true *ātman*. The flow of memory-based cognitions is not a *sādhana* that is enjoined

[530] BUbh 1.4.7.

or should be done, it just naturally occurs.[531] Apparently for Śaṅkara, *nididhyāsana* is not a will-based process of repetition or repeated conceptual learning, nor does it include effort in extracting the meaning of the sentence. While it may require one to intentionally pull the mind back from distractions it ultimately requires one to be properly receptive and allow the sentences directly to reveal *brahman*. During the contemplative process the student is an open and passive recipient to the intrinsic power and active agency the texts have for conferring *brahmavidyā*. Another way of understanding the process is viewing it as a negation of a theory/practice model, where one first understands sentence meaning and subsequently acts on them. Śaṅkara's *nididhāysana* at first glance looks like this, but it is not a practice done to the text, or a practice to produce knowledge from the text. *Nididhāysana* is a mode of textual study.[532] The texts alone convey knowledge and *nididhyāsana* is simply an extension of listening (*śravaṇa*).

This argument should make us pause and rethink our notions of contemplation. If we identify *nididhyāsana*, or at least an advanced form of *nididhyāsana*, with *smṛti-santati*, then it automatically arises with knowledge from the sentence and cannot be separated from understanding the texts. It is not something done before knowledge from the sentence, nor is it any type of practice or process to requiring intentional action after the rise of *brahmavidyā*. In fact *smṛti santati* should require no effort and there is no

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531 Śaṅkara discusses this in BUbh 1.4.7. See later section on BU 4.4.21 for more information.
532 We may understand this in terms of Advaita's theory of causality where the cause inheres in the effect (*satkāryavāda*). *Śravaṇa* is the cause/content of *nididhyāsana* and therefore we may, in a sense, reduce *nididhyāsana* to *śravaṇa* just as we can reduce a pot to clay.

option to do it or not to do it. Once one knows the *ātman* he sees his self in all things and all things in his self. Where is the possibility of not seeing the self?

5.4: Revisiting the Problem of Injunctions: *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.21

The issues of repetition and *smṛti santati* are not always as clear in Śaṅkara's writing as I have made them out to be in the preceding section. As I have shown earlier, one of Śaṅkara's primary concerns is prohibiting any form of action from the pursuit of self-knowledge because knowledge and action are incompatible. Actions such as *karma yoga* and meditation are vitally important for gaining the requisite four-fold qualifications for knowledge (*sādhana catuṣṭaya*), but they cannot act as independent generators of *brahmavidyā*. *Śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* are thus not actions like *karma yoga*. Śaṅkara believes this distinction is crucial in the study and orientation of Advaita students. Performing ritual actions, following injunctions, and accepting a theory/practice model runs afoul of important Advaita doctrines. This position compromises the validity of the Upaniṣads by privileging action as a means for self-knowledge, and undermines the individual's pursuit of liberation by leading him astray along a fruitless path.

Śaṅkara would hold that there is no action present in *nididhyāsana* if he viewed it as a mode of the *śabda pramāṇa*; however, we find some curious twists in Śaṅkara's writing regarding action and *nididhyāsana*, particularly within the context of repetition and *smṛti santati*. These twists raise epistemological questions about the chronology and relationship between contemplation, textual study, and self-knowledge. As Paul Hacker

notes, Śaṅkara is uneasy with repetition and *smṛti santati*. In some places he endorses them and in others he rejects them.[533]

Śaṅkara lumps together a handful of Upaniṣadic sentences that parallel the root text for *nididhyāsana*.[534] These sentences include "The *ātman* should be meditated upon" (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.7);[535] "That (is the self) you should try to discover, that (is the self) you should seek to perceive" (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.7.1);[536] "Therefore the knower of *brahman*, having known all about scholarship, should try to live upon that strength which comes of knowledge; having known all about this strength and scholarship, he becomes meditative; having known all about both meditativeness and its opposite, he becomes a knower of *brahman*." (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.5.1);[537] "One should meditate only upon the world of the Self (BU 1.4.15);[538] and "Having known just that (self), the wise *brahmin* should obtain insight. He should not ponder over many words, for that is wearying of speech." (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.21).[539] Each of

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533 See Hacker 1995, p. 107. Hacker (as well as other scholars such as Nakamura and Trevor Leggett) believed Śaṅkara was the author of the *Yogasūtravivaraṇa* and that he was a Yogin before becoming a Vedāntin. Hacker sees Śaṅkara's changing position over repetition as a manifestation of his early indecision over reconciling Yoga and Vedānta theories. Though Hacker is correct in noting Śaṅkara's changing and perhaps conflicting views on repetition, I disagree with him on a couple points. Hacker argues that Śaṅkara rejects *smṛti-santati* in BUbh 1.4.7. I believe he accepts it here, as well as elsewhere, most notably BGbh 18.55. Hacker then uses this argument to claim the MāUbh (in which Śaṅkara accepts *abhyāsa* in 3.31 and which is similar to YS 1.12) is an earlier work of Śaṅkara. This does not make sense because Śaṅkara clearly accepts repetition in the BS and the BG also. Śaṅkara is amenable to yoga praxis in most of his work.

534 For example, see BSbh 1.1.4 (Gambhirananda 1996, p. 24) and BSbh 4.1.1, where Śaṅkara groups the passages together within the view of an opponent who critiques contemplation as an action. Also see BSbh 2.3.39. Sometimes this group also includes MU 2.2.6 or 3.2.9.

535 *ātmety evopāsīta* (my translation).

536 *so 'nveṣṭavyaḥ sa vijijñāsitavyaḥ* (my translation).

537 Madhavananda 1993, p. 331.

538 Madhavananda 1993, p. 125.

539 *tam eva dhīro vijñāya prajñāṁ kurvīta brāhmaṇaḥ*

these sentences is controversial for similar reasons. In the following section, I will take just one, BU 4.4.21, as a case study to explain Śaṅkara's efforts to reconcile some potential contradictions among Upaniṣadic sentences.

BU 4.4.21 appears within the discussion of Janaka and Yājñavalkya, and is the last of a series of verses from 4.8-21 dealing with knowledge of *brahman* and the self. Śaṅkara wrote a brief and seemingly innocuous explanation of this sentence; however, Śaṅkara's direct disciple, Sureśvara, spends 268 *vārtikas* focusing on the first line of this passage in his *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣyavārttika*. Sureśvara, perceiving a dangerous precedent in his teacher's commentary, disagrees with him, and instead proposes eight other possible interpretations of the sentence.[540] He also summarizes and refutes Maṇḍana Miśra's position on 4.4.21. Sureśvara's unexpected discussion of this passage should make us pause and reconsider the views of Maṇḍana and Śaṅkara. What is it about their views that prompted such a discussion? Maṇḍana and Śaṅkara's interpretations of 4.4.21 document a problem in the relationship between contemplative practice, textual study, and liberating knowledge, which led to conflicts among later Advaitins.

Maṇḍana cites BU 4.4.21 along with other passages such as BU 1.4.7 and BU 2.4.5.[541] Evidently Advaita's broader philosophical community accepted the association of these sentences by Śaṅkara's time. Maṇḍana believes these refer to a contemplative

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nānudhyāyād bahūñ chabdān vāco viglāpanaṁ hi tat | BU 4.4.21 (my translation).
540 Potter, 1981, pp. 515-16.
Also see *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi*, 1.67.
541 *Brahmasiddhi*, p. 113, 154.

practice he labels variously as *dhyāna*, *bhāvanā*, *anucintana*, and/or *upāsanā*. This contemplation consists of a continuous succession of thoughts cultivated from verbal knowledge of the *ātman*. With repetition it eventually culminates in direct self-knowledge, *sākṣātkāra* or *anubhava*.[542] Among these passages, BU 4.4.21 fits his model the closest because the verb *vijñāya*, having known, is a gerund indicating an earlier action than the principal verb. This implies that *vijñāya* is one stage of knowledge and *prajñā*, or insight, is a later one. Thus he can interpret *vijñāya*, as "understanding the Upaniṣad sentences explaining the absolute nature of *brahman*," and can interpret the obtaining of *prajñā* as a matter of contemplating that earlier verbal knowledge. The particle *eva* in the phrase *tam eva* indicates exclusion and further specifies this type of contemplation, in which the flow of thoughts can rest only on the non-dual *ātman* without any relationship to other objects or attributes.[543]

One problem Maṇḍana faces is the optative verb, *kurvīta*. He spends considerable effort denying any action or injunction for action implicit to this verb. In arguments reminiscent of Śaṅkara, he argues that BU 4.4.21 deals with an existing entity and has an immediate result of direct knowledge. This removes contemplation from the domain of ritual action, which produces a future result. Maṇḍana also argues that contemplation is a natural inclination that arises spontaneously after studying the Upaniṣad texts and thus does not require an injunction.[544]

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[542] *Brahmasiddhi*, p. 153.
[543] *Brahmasiddhi*, p. 154.
[544] *Brahmasiddhi*, p. 154. Also see Śaṅkapāṇi's commentary p. 292.

Let us now turn to Śaṅkara. According to Śaṅkara's brief gloss on BU 4.4.21, *vijñāya*, refers to a wise person who has known the *ātman* from the texts and from the instructions of the teacher. Yet this wise person must still gain insight (*prajñā*) in order to put an end to all questioning. The means for obtaining *prajñā* are renunciation (*saṁnyāsa*), calmness (*śama*), control (*dama*), withdrawal of the sense mind from the objects of senses (*uparati*), fortitude (*titikṣa*), and concentration (*samādhāna*). He goes on to explain that one should not use too many words, but a few words dealing with the unity of the self may be used. Śaṅkara's explanation raises a difficult issue. If a wise person has already listened to the teaching, studied the texts, and gained *vijñāna* of the *ātman*, then why do anything else? Why will the wise person still have any remaining questions after gaining *brahmavidyā*? Furthermore, what difference is there between knowledge from texts and knowledge gained from contemplation? Śaṅkara does not answer this question in BUbh 4.4.21, yet he discusses the issue earlier in the context of an extensive commentary on BU 1.4.7.

In BUbh 1.4.7 Śaṅkara first specifically refutes opponents who say,

> One should generate another particular knowledge regarding the *ātman* by meditation. By that, the *ātman* is known, and that alone is the removal of ignorance, not the knowledge regarding the *ātman* born from the Vedic sentences. With regard to this issue, there are sentences such as: "Having known just that (self), the wise *brahmin* should obtain insight" (BU 4.4.21). "The self should be seen, should be heard, should be reflected on, and contemplated upon" (BU 2.4.5). "That (is the self) you should try to discover, that (is the self) you should seek to perceive" (CU 8.7.1).[545]

[545] *upāsanenātmaviṣayaṁ viśiṣṭaṁ vijñānāntaraṁ; tenātmā jñāyate; avidyānivartakaṁ ca tadeva nātmaviṣayaṁ vedavākyajanitaṁ vijñānam iti | etasminn arthe vacanāny api vijñāya prajñāṁ kurvīta,*

In his response to this passage, Śaṅkara writes that the contemplation referred to in BU 4.4.21, and other such passages such as our root text for *nididhyāsana* (BU 2.4.5), does not create any new special state of knowledge separate from textual knowledge. This strong statement puts into question any distinction between propositional knowledge from *śravaṇa* and non-propositional knowledge from *nididhyāsana* that we may be tempted to assign to Śaṅkara. Śaṅkara clearly admonishes other Advaitins who make such a distinction and he claims the knowledge from *śravaṇa* is itself direct *brahmavidyā*. He reiterates that sentences such as *tat tvam asi*, lead to direct *brahmavidyā* when understood, therefore there is no necessity for other actions or repetition.

Later in the commentary the opponent again objects that the continuous flow of remembered self-knowledge (*ātmajñānasmṛtisantati*) arising from the sentence is fundamentally different than the knowledge cultivated from only listening (*śravaṇa*). Śaṅkara continues to explain his position when the following response,

> Right when the knowledge, whose subject is the *ātman*, rises from listening to the sentence imparting (the knowledge of) *ātman*, at that time, the arising of it destroys the false knowledge of the self. It arises only in this way. And when the false knowledge concerning the *ātman* is removed, there are no memories, which are natural, produced from that (ignorance), and whose matter are things other than the self. And because of the knowledge of worthlessness (or the state of not possessing absolute reality) and because the self is contrary to that worthlessness – when the *ātman* is indeed known other things are understood as worthless because they possess numerous defects such as being transitory, painful, impure, etc. Therefore, for one who has understood the self, there is an absence of memory of knowing the not-self. Because it remains, there is no need to enjoin

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draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyaḥ mantavyo nididhyāsitavyaḥ, so 'nveṣṭavyaḥ sa vijijñāsitavyaḥ ityādīni // (my translation)

> the continuous flow of memory of the knowledge of the oneness of the self, since it exists already in fact. And because that memory (of the self) removes the defects of suffering such as sorrow, confusion, fear, and effort, etc.[546]

Śaṅkara explains that *prajñām kurvīta* refers to a contemplative process of repeating memory-based knowledge focused on the unity of the self. This contemplation arises automatically from listening to the texts. It does not require an injunction for additional action because it happens naturally and is invariable after the goal of *brahmavidyā* is gained through understanding the sentence. There is no activity on the sentence separate from the *brahmavidyā* arising from the sentence, and there is nothing left to accomplish after the sentence destroys ignorance.

Yet later in the same commentary on BU 1.4.7 Śaṅkara makes a few surprising statements in his dialogue with the opponent:

> Śaṅkara: You said that sentences such as '*vijñāya prajñāṃ kurvīta*' signify (the practice of) contemplation distinct from understanding the sentence meaning. This is true. But it does not signify an original injunction. A restrictive injunction is intended for what is posited as an alternative.
>
> Opponent: How is contemplation posited as an alternative, since you said that the continued flow of memory (of self-knowledge) is invariable because it is an inevitable consequence?
>
> Śaṅkara: True. But still, because there are inevitably the results of *karma*, which cause the production of the body, even when there is the gain of right knowledge, there is also necessarily the future activity of body, mind, and speech because of the strength of *karma*, whose course has been undertaken like the continuation of

546 *yadaivātmapratipādakavākyaśravaṇād ātmaviṣayaṃ vijñānam utpadyate tadaiva tadutpadyamānaṃ tadviṣayaṃ mithyājñānaṃ nivartayad evotpadyate; ātmaviṣayamithyājñānanivṛttau ca tatprabhavāḥ smṛtayo na bhavanti svābhāvikyo 'nātmavastubhedaviṣayāḥ; anarthatvāvagateḥ ca ātmāvagatau hi satyām anyadvastu anarthatvenāvagamyate, anityaduḥkhāśudhyādibahudoṣavattvāt ātmavastunaś ca tadvilakṣaṇatvāt; tasmādanātmavijñānasmṛtīnām ātmāvagater abhāvaprāptiḥ; pāriśeṣyād ātmaikatvavijñānasmṛtisaṃtater arthata eva bhāvān na vidheyatvam | śokamohabhayāyāsādiduḥkhadoṣanivartakatvāc ca* (my translation).

an arrow after it has been released. The cognition of knowledge, being weaker than (*karma*), is posited as an alternative. Therefore the continuous memory of self-knowledge, dependent on the strength of practices like renunciation, dispassion, etc, must be restricted. But an original injunction should not be enjoined because we said (contemplation) is posited (as an alternative). Therefore, sentences such as '*vijñāya prajñām kurvīta*' have the meaning of a restrictive injunction for the contemplation of gained knowledge. Another meaning is not possible.[547]

This passage is quite dense so I will unpack it a bit. Śaṅkara concedes that *prajñām kurvīta* has the meaning of a contemplation in addition to understanding the sentence meaning. He then claims that this contemplation can be an alternative, meaning one has a choice whether to contemplate or not, and thus he accepts a restrictive injunction (*niyama vidhi*). Śaṅkara's acceptance of an additional contemplation and a restrictive injunction appears to contradict his earlier arguments for a complete knowledge triggered from the sentences and his exclusion of any injunctions from the way scripture works. Earlier Śaṅkara argued that contemplation is a natural course with no other alternative, making an injunction superfluous. The opponent catches this apparent contradiction, and questions how one can have a choice with regard to contemplation when it was said to be inevitable.

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547 *yat tūktam – 'vijñāya prajñāṃ kurvīta' ityādivacanānāṃ vākyārthavijñānavyatirekeṇopāsanārthatvam iti, satyam etat; kiṃ tu na apūrvavidhyarthatā; pakṣe prāptasya niyamārthataiva* |

kathaṃ punar upāsanasya pakṣaprāptiḥ yāvatā pāriśeṣyād ātmavijñānasmṛtisaṃtatir nityaivety abhihitam?

bāḍham – yadyapy evam śarīrārambhakasya karmaṇo niyataphalatvāt samyagjñānaprāptāv api avaśyaṃ bhāvinī pravṛttir vaṅmanaḥkāyānām, labdhavṛtteḥ karmaṇo balīyastvāt mukteṣvādi pravṛttivat; tena pakṣe prāptaṃ jñānapravṛttidourbalyam |
tasmāt tyāgavairāgyādisādhanabalāvalambena ātmavijñānasmṛtisaṃtatir niyantavyā bhavati; na tv apūrvā kartavyā; prāptatvāt ity avocāma |
tasmāt prāptavijñānasmṛtisaṃtānaniyamavidhyarthāni 'vijñāya prajñām kurvīta' ityādivākyāni, anyārthāsaṃbhavāt | BUbh 1.4.7 (my translation).

Śaṅkara responds that one must maintain this contemplation, in the form of continued memory of verbal knowledge, to counter the force of *karma* that has already begun to manifest (*prārabdha karma*), because *karma* is stronger than knowledge from the texts. Śaṅkara explains that contemplation can be an alternative and subject to a restrictive injunction when we factor in *karma* as a variable, which disrupts knowledge after it has arisen from the Upaniṣads. Once again Śaṅkara's explanation makes us question just what kind of knowledge he is speaking of. In the earlier passages in BUbh 1.4.7 where he writes about self-knowledge (*atmajñāna*) arising form Upaniṣadic sentences, he clearly means direct liberating *brahmavidyā*. In this passage "knowledge" has an ambiguous meaning. Either it is not direct *brahmavidyā*, which would appear to contradict his earlier statements, or it is *brahmavidyā* which is somehow susceptible to *karmic* disturbances. The latter position is problematic for it may force the Advaitin to concede *brahmavidyā* is subject to faults, disturbances, or vitiation.

The restrictive injunction points out a specific way of accomplishing something when there are multiple options, and is used particularly when there is some other way we are likely to resort to. When we favor an inappropriate action, the injunction comes in as a restriction, which supplies a different action not usually adopted.[548] The common example for a *niyama* is "He pounds the rice" (*vrīhīn avahanti*) from the context of making the *puroḍāśa* cakes in the *darśapūrṇamāsa* ritual. Removing the husks from the rice grains is the goal to be accomplished. There is more than one option to accomplish

[548] According to Bhaskara, a "*niyamavidhi* establishes a matter which is non-established in the alternative." *pakṣe 'prāptasya prāpako vidhir nyamavidhiḥ* (*Arthasasaṅgraḥ,* 3.50)

husking such as pounding or using one's nails. The *vidhi* comes in here and restricts one to pounding the rice and simultaneously excludes other means such as the nails. Thus it functions in two ways. Another example used is "Perform the sacrifice on even ground" (*same deśe yajeta*). This *vidhi* restricts one to performing sacrifice on even ground and excludes using uneven ground.[549] If one has already adopted a proper alternative, such as pounding the rice, then the *niyama* does not come into play.

In this case, contemplation is not an invariable course if one's mind and *ātmajñāna* are distracted or obstructed by *karma*. Therefore, due to the problem of *karma*, the injunction comes in to restrict the Advaitin to contemplation. Śaṅkara's intention is to avoid making contemplation an action subject to the Mīmāṁsaka's original injunction, the *apūrva vidhi*. Contemplation is not an original injunction because original injunctions establish something previously unknown, and here contemplation is already a known alternative.

Śaṅkara's and Maṇḍana's explanations of BU 4.4.21 raise some difficult issues with reference to Advaita's contemplative practice. The crucial question is whether to see contemplation as occurring before or after the rise of correct knowledge. According to Śaṅkara and Sureśvara, there are a number of problems in Maṇḍana's position, which emphasizes that contemplation would be carried out after gaining correct verbal knowledge. An insistence on contemplation to occur after verbal knowledge gained from

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[549] The *niyama* also plays an important function in Sanskrit grammar. "The term is very frequently used by grammarians in connection with a restriction laid down with reference to the application of a grammatical rule generally on the strength of that rule, or a part of it, liable to become superfluous if the restriction has not been laid down" (Abhyankar and Shukla, 1986, p. 222).

the Upaniṣads opens contemplation up to the dangers of the action interpretation. Most importantly, this position vitiates the importance of the Upaniṣads as a means of knowledge and implies two types of self-knowledge, indirect verbal knowledge and directly occurring self-knowledge. If contemplation is a separate and independent activity that produces an additional type of knowledge, then Maṇḍana's position mistakenly elevates contemplation to the status of an independent *pramāṇa*, and leads to the absurdity, at least in Śaṅkara's view, that an action can produce self-knowledge. But according to Śaṅkara, correct knowledge from the texts alone liberates the individual. Nothing else is required. The confusion, however, from Śaṅkara, is whether this must be so in all cases.

The commonly accepted view of Śaṅkara among Sureśvara, Padmapāda, and the Vivaraṇa school, explains contemplation as a mode of the *śabda pramāṇa*, simply an extension of listening and studying the texts. The repetition in contemplation is dependent on the texts, and only necessary when a student faces certain obstacles in the process of studying even after *śravaṇa* and *manana*. Maintaining a continuous flow of verbal knowledge perfects one's understanding of the texts. Yet this basic position has its own problems. Śaṅkara does not clearly explain how this contemplation differs from listening or how it functions separately. Furthermore, how does repeating one's memory of improperly understood textual knowledge cultivate self-knowledge?

Śaṅkara gives a third, nuanced position in his explanation of *vijñāya prajñāṃ kurvīta*. He admits contemplation after *brahmavidyā* as a separate activity yet he places it in the context of *karma*. This contemplation does not create new *brahmavidyā* but

functions to stabilize one's *brahmavidyā* in the face of difficult life experiences. This position attempts to avoid the pitfalls of Maṇḍana's view of contemplation. I believe Śaṅkara recognizes the real difficulties that his students faced in gaining a direct and immediate recognition of non-duality even after extended studying with a qualified teacher. His position refers to the predicament of holding awareness of non-duality in the face of contradictory life experiences; however, he articulates this problem in terms of the mechanics of *karma*, a position that has its own problems. How is *prārabdha karma* affecting a liberated person's knowledge and how can contemplation counteract this *karma*?

Sureśvara provides a radical fourth alternative to avoid these problems. He defines contemplation as *brahmavidyā* itself.[550] Sure śvara's position negates the whole concept of contemplation as a practice of mentally repeating textual knowledge, and emphasizes listening and logical reflection as the only means for gaining liberation. He avoids many of the difficulties that Maṇḍana and Śaṅkara have; yet at the same time he is forced into textual acrobatics, for many Upaniṣadic sentences appear to recommend some type of contemplation for self-knowledge.[551]

It is evident from this discussion of BU 4.4.21 that early Advaitins faced some troubling questions trying to reconcile the placement of contemplation within a

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550 *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣyavārttika* Verse. 282 on the *Puruṣavidha Brāhmaṇa* (Jog and Hino 1993, p. 282). See Potter 1981, p. 465.

551 Sureśvara does accept contemplation in some places. For example, in *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi* 3.125 he accepts some form of repetitive contemplation in the case that the texts are "heard only a little" (*īṣatśrutam*) or are "half-heard" (*sāmiśrutam*). In this case contemplation can help perfect one's hearing. Sureśvara carefully distinguishes his position from the theory that contemplation cultivates a new and different knowledge over and above knowledge from the Upaniṣadic sentences.

chronology of Advaita discipline involving textual study and gaining self-knowledge. It is perhaps of little surprise that Śaṅkara rarely discusses contemplation unless forced to by the text he is commentating on. Even then, Śaṅkara obliquely raises these issues without clearly resolving them. His own ambiguity on these issues is historically significant, for it foreshadows the unresolved debates that would follow among later Advaitins over the function and application of contemplative practice. These scholastic debates are concerned with technical and somewhat obscure aspects of Advaita soteriology and Mīmāṁsā hermeneutics; yet I believe they reflect the pragmatic concerns of Advaita practitioners, who struggled to practice contemplation and sought to clarify and define their contemplative process.

5.5: The Question of Liberating Experience

Śaṅkara understands the nature of one's true self (*ātman*) as awareness, which is always present, immediately knowing, and intrinsically reflexive. He further identifies liberation (*mokṣa*) with the *ātman*, and claims that liberation is never gained because it is already present as one's self. Yet despite this, individuals are still driven to move from insecurity and finiteness towards security, wholeness, and freedom from suffering. This brings them to study Upaniṣadic texts in order to remove self-ignorance and recognize the self-luminous *ātman*. Such study is not for the sake of mere academic or theoretical knowledge. At some level there is to be a change, a transformation of the individual in terms of one's identity, emotional freedom, and happiness, which occurs through liberating self-knowledge even though self-knowledge is not separate from the ever-present *ātman*, and the *ātman* cannot be a new experience by definition. These theses set up a question within the parameters of Śaṅkara's soteriology: How does the Advaitin recognize the crucial change, the direct recognition that is *brahmavidyā* occuring in time through studying the Upaniṣads and at the same time avoid making self-knowledge a new experience?

5.5.1: Indirect Knowledge (*parokṣajñāna*) and Direct knowledge (*aparokṣajñāna*)

Gaining *brahmavidyā* is often viewed as a transformative movement from mediate verbal knowledge (*parokṣa jñāna*) to immediate knowledge or experience (*aparokṣa jñāna or anubhava*). The basic difference between *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa jñāna* is sometimes illustrated with the example of the taste of sugar. If someone has

never tasted sugar she cannot understand sweetness. Someone may describe the experience of sweetness, giving her *parokṣa* knowledge, but her knowledge is *aparokṣa* only after she tastes sugar. No amount of descriptive indirect knowledge compares to the direct experience. Similarly, some Vedāntins consider *nididhyāsana*, or other practices such as meditation, as essential for gaining immediacy of knowledge and as the bridge between *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* knowledge.

A rigid distinction between *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* self-knowledge was an influential concept in Advaita literature by Śaṅkara's time that continued through later centuries. This distinction has remained in much of contemporary academic literature and has assumed even more importance among many neo-Vedānta traditions during the past century. The distinction between *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* self-knowledge reflects the importance of gaining immediate knowledge of non-duality. However, this distinction is ambiguous and problematic. How do we define it? How is it related to the process of studying and contemplation? And does it conflict with other aspects of Advaita's metaphysics and epistemology? A better understanding of *aparokṣa* self-knowledge is necessary before questioning if and how *nididhyāsana* can function as a bridge or vehicle for the immediacy of *brahmavidyā*.

In the following sections I explain some of the nuances of the *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* distinction, why it is problematic or useful, and in what ways we can properly interpret Śaṅkara's use of it. I will also analyze the importance of *anubhava* (experience) and contextualize how this discussion affects the way we define the function of *nididhyāsana* and how it illumines some problems that Śaṅkara and post Śaṅkara

Advaitins faced in explaining *nididhyāsana*. I then explore Śaṅkara's theory of mental dispositions (*saṁskāra*s) and the way such dispositions and habitual affective tendencies and affect even self-knowledge. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how *nididhyāsana* helps to remove such *saṁskāras* and cultivate a stability and steadfastness (*niṣṭhā*) in *brahmavidyā.*

The nature of mediate (*parokṣa*) and immediate (*aparokṣa*) knowledge is closely related to earlier discussions of the *prasaṅkhyāna* contemplation and of theory and practice. Śaṅkara's adversaries such as Vedāntins who combine knowledge and action and the *prasaṅkhyānavādin*s, as well as many popular neo-Vedāntins such as Swami Vivekananda, view verbal knowledge as indirect (*parokṣa*) theory, contemplation as practice, and direct (*aparokṣa*) experience as the result of practice. Implicit to this interpretation of the term *parokṣa*, is the idea that verbal knowledge is intrinsically limited because words denote finite objects, and function within empirical dualities such as knower and known. Such knowledge, limited by verbalization and conceptualization, cannot be identified as liberating knowledge of non-duality. Thus, something beyond that is necessary, and this indirect knowledge must be made immediate (*aparokṣa*) through some radical transformation or transcendent experience (often termed *anubhava*).

The simplistic illustration of tasting sugar reveals some major problems for the idea of *parokṣa* self-knowledge. The illustration is clearly flawed because it is premised on the mediate nature of the object of perception, sweetness, before one tastes sugar. In Advaita theory, a new experience of *brahman* is not necessary nor even possible because of its nature as self-illuminating. Based on the earlier discussions of knowledge and

action, and theory and practice, a number of similar problems with trying to coherently understand *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* knowledge are quickly evident.[552] I think the fundamental problem with the view that you can know the *ātman* in an indirect manner is that there is an *ātman* to realize when in fact that *ātman* is just you and already immediately known. The distinction between *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* self-knowledge nurtures the idea that there must be a movement from mediacy to immediacy. This is partly legitimate for certainly there is a change in terms of one's experience of ignorance and its removal, but it is also an idea that lends itself to a quest for experience, particularly if we equate *brahmavidyā* with some form of mystical experience. If one believes that the *aparokṣa ātman* is separate from and distant from one's self-identity then there is inevitably a pursuit to gain and experience that *ātman*. This mistaken pursuit of experience is a potential problem that completely contradicts the basic tenets of Advaita Vedānta and compromises the importance that Śaṅkara places on the *śruti*. Śaṅkara's understanding is not that one must attain *brahman*, but that one already is *brahman*. Experiential events are products, transitory, dependent on the person (not the object), and do not necessarily contain knowledge content. However, as I will explain below, the *parokṣa*/*aparokṣa* distinction itself is not necessarily in contradiction to Śaṅkara because with the proper interpretation it may not force one to seek a new experience of *brahman*. But this distinction has lent itself to the misleading assumption of seeking experience, either as its premise or as its result.

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552 The conflicts are obviously with experience, a knowledge event, self-luminosity, etc. Self-luminosity is a theory which is clearly not compatible with a *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* distinction and at subtler levels we

A second related issue is the idea that self-knowledge is something positive. Despite recognizing that *brahman* is not attainable and is ever present, one may assume that knowledge is something new and positive. The *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* distinction lends itself to the interpretation that knowledge is positive because *aparokṣa* knowledge must be gained or because *parokṣa* knowledge must be positively transformed into *aparokṣa* knowledge. This interpretation contradicts Advaita's theory of ignorance. Colloquially Advaitins often use the phrase "gaining knowledge" or speak of a *pramāṇa* as conferring knowledge. However, this contradicts an important and often overlooked epistemological idea of Advaita; that self-ignorance exists in a positive manner and self-knowledge is only the removal of positive ignorance.

According to virtually all influential post-Śaṅkara Advaitins, self-ignorance is not the absence of knowledge, but rather a projecting and veiling power with some level of ontological reality even if indescribable. In the context of the fundamental problem of the misapprehension of self-luminous *brahman* and the resulting mistaken superimposition of self and not-self, *brahmavidyā* functions as the negation of self-ignorance, not as the accretion of new positive knowledge. This is the inverse idea of the more popular notion that views ignorance as the absence of knowledge, and which requires positive knowledge to fill that absence. For Advaita, self-knowledge is stripping away false assumptions, confusion, and ignorance that cause the superimposition of erroneous identities. Knowledge removes these till one is left with only the *aparokṣa* self as one's identity. It negates all dualities and even the concept of identity between two

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may have conflicts with *saṁskāras* and *jīvanmukti*, etc.

objects. This is why Advaitins interprets the Upaniṣads as employing language methods which function in mostly negative ways, other than negating the existence of *brahman* (so as not to lapse into nihilism or emptiness) because brahman transcends the duality of existence and non-existence. This is a key that allows Advaitins to maintain the *aparokṣatva* of the self regardless of knowledge or ignorance. They can claim there is no true change in liberation, only a change in the sense of removing obstacles to what is always available and evident. This position, which emphasizes the immediate availability of the self and points to the role of the *śruti* as correcting misunderstanding rather then producing totally new knowledge, provides room for the *śruti* to independently give liberation. The issue is only one of ignorance, and in Śaṅkara' opinion, the *śruti* possesses the power to remove that ignorance. [553]

Given the above critique of *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* knowledge, and the earlier critique of theory and practice, one would think that Śaṅkara clearly dismisses this conceptual distinction. For the most part he does. We find implicit rejections of *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* self-knowledge in his refutation of action and meditation, his explanation of self-luminosity, and his emphasis on *śruti* as a souce of knowledge. And he explicitly dismisses this distinction in his criticism of *prasaṅkhyāna* (repeated meditation) in chapter eighteen of the *Upadeśasāhasrī*.[554] Yet despite his clear rebuttals of this distinction among other Vedāntins, we find other places where Śaṅkara leaves himself

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[553] See Rambachan 1986, p. 31.

[554] See the comparison of Śaṅkara and Maṇḍana in chapter 2. In US 18.14 Śaṅkara indirectly criticizes the *parokṣa aparokṣa* distinction as part of the *prasaṅkhyānavādin pūrvapakṣa*. In US 18.201-2 Śaṅkara

open to such a distinction or even endorses it. The following section analyzes some textual attestations that may be interpreted as *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa jñāna* and the related problem of *anubhava* (tentatively translated as experience); and speculates whether Śaṅkara is self-contradictory in such instances or if we can integrate such exceptions into his more commonly accepted ideas of Advaita epistemology.

I am not aware of Śaṅkara using the terms *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* knowledge together in reference to his own understanding of Advaita; however, he sometimes uses other terms together while referring to self-knowledge such as *jñāna* and *vijñāna*,[555] or *jānāti* and *abhijānāti*.[556] These terms show his recognition of some difference in knowledge or a process of changing clarity. Śaṅkara also refers to clarity, depth, and stability of self-knowledge with terms like *sthita-prajñā* and *jñāna-niṣṭhā* (one whose knowledge is firm).[557] Why does he bother qualifying self-knowledge as firm (*sthita* or *niṣṭha*)? These compounds imply there is an earlier time where one lacks this clarity even after exposure to the *śabda pramāṇa*. But Śaṅkara does not clearly explain his use of these terms and whether or not they correspond to some sort of *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* distinction. These terms are mostly found in his commentaries when he is constrained to use them because they are in the source text. The terms *jñāna* and *vijñāna* occur together in the *Bhagavadgītā* 3.41, 6.8, 7.2, 9.1, and 18.42.[558] Śaṅkara's consistent gloss on these

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directly denies *parokṣa* knowledge and explains that *aparokṣa* knowledge comes from text itself. Sureśvara, however, is probably the most forceful critic of *parokṣa aparokṣa brahmavidyā*.

555 Another potentially supporting term is *prajñā*.

556 Some later Vedāntins do make this distinction. For example see Vidyāraṇya's *Pañcadaśī* 1.62-3.

557 See the section on *jñāna-niṣṭhā* at the end of this chapter for a detailed discussion.

558 I am not aware of places where Śaṅkara uses such terms together independent of their mention in the primary texts; though I have not specifically searched through all his writing for them.

terms provides some important clues to how we may better understand the usefulness of the *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* distinction.[559]

BG 3.41 states: "Therefore, O scion of the Bharata Dynasty, after first controlling the organs, renounce this one which is sinful and a destroyer of *jñānam* and *vijñānam"*[560] Śaṅkara provides the following commentary, "*Jñāna* is the knowledge of the *ātmā* from the *śāstra* and the teacher. *Vijñāna* is the *anubhava* of that in particular (or the specific *anubhava* of that).[561]

BG 6.8 states, "One whose mind is satisfied with *jñānam* and *vijñānam*, who is unmoved, who has the organs under control, is said to be Self-absorbed. The yogin treats equally a lump of earth, a stone, and gold."[562] Here, Śaṅkara explains *jñānavijñānatṛptātmā* as, "*Jñāna* is the thorough knowledge of the things (or word meanings) explained by the *śāstra*. But *vijñāna* is making the things known from the *śāstra* one's own *anubhava* just as they are."[563]

In these examples Śaṅkara makes a distinction between the knowledge (*jñāna*) gained from the *śruti* and some type of specific or particular knowledge (*vijñāna*), which is more intimate or thorough than *jñāna*. This distinction recognizes some process in

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559 Śaṅkara does not explain the terms in BG 18.42

560 Gambhirananda 1995, p. 171.
tasmād tvam indriyāṇy ādau niyamya bharatarṣabha
pāpmānaṁ prajahi hy enaṁ jñānavijñānanāśanam (BG 3.41)

561 *jñānam śāstrataḥ ca ātmādīnām avabodhaḥ; vijñānam viśeṣataḥ tadanubhavaḥ*

562 *jñānavijñānatṛptātmā kūṭastho vijitendriyaḥ* |
yukta ity ucyate yogi samaloṣṭaśmakāñcanaḥ || (my translation).

563 *jñānavijñānatṛptātmā - jñānaṃ- śāstroktapadārthānāṃ parijñānaṃ vijñānaṃ tu śāstrato jñātānāṁ tathā eva svānubhavakaraṇaṁ* | (my translation).

In BG 7.2 and 9.1 Śaṅkara similarly defines *vijñānam* as *svānubhavasaṃyuktam* and *anubhavayuktam* respectively.

understanding beyond simply hearing the words and having a thorough intellectual understanding of the texts. *Vijñāna* appears to be fully assimilated knowledge where there is no distance between one's self and what the *śruti* is saying. *Vijñāna* is not just a possibility, belief, or shaky knowledge. It is sure recognition where one directly and completely sees the truth of *brahman*.[564] Should we then understand the terms *jñāna* and *vijñāna* as synonyms for *parokṣa jñāna* and *aparokṣa vijñāna*?[565] This question hinges on the term *anubhava*, which I purposely left untranslated in the above BG passages.

5.5.2: Is Liberation an Experience (*anubhava*)?

The term *anubhava* is enigmatic and ambiguous. According to Wilhelm Halbfass,

> *Anubhava* and corresponding verb forms appear in statements about 'experiencing' pain, 'being in' states of consciousness, such as waking and dreaming, 'realizing' or 'comprehending' the meanings of words and sentences, but also in the compound *ātmānubhava*, 'experience of the self,' which is said to be free from all pain (*sarvaduḥkhavinirmukta*). On the other hand, *anubhava* is used in an absolute sense, as 'experience,' 'immediate awareness,' 'self-presencing' per se; we hear about a 'seeing' (*dṛṣṭi*) which has the 'nature of immediate awareness' (*anubhavātman*), about the absolute or *brahman* as *anubhavātman*, or simply about *anubhava* as such in a sense which commentators unanimously paraphrase as *sākṣin*, 'absolute witness' or 'self.'[566]

Though Śaṅkara uses the term *anubhava* rarely, it occurs in some key contexts and has become a source of academic debate. The most common translation of *anubhava* is "experience". However, the word "experience" is highly problematic. Personal

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[564] Following Śaṅkara, we can define *vijñāna* as correct vision (*samyagdarśana*) (BSbh 4.1.7).
[565] In other contexts *vijñāna* can refer to mind or *buddhi* (see BS 2.3.32) or may be used synonymously with *upāsanā* (see TU 1.3.3-4)

"experience" implies an observational psychological event and a transitive action, such as perception, that requires an object. However, *brahman* cannot be the object of an experience. A number of people, including contemporary neo-Vedāntins such as Swami Vivekananda as well as neo-Hindu scholars such as Radhakrishnan attempt to make *anubhava* an independent means of knowledge, a type of empirical evidence of non-duality. They then read forms of mystical experience or yogic *asamprajñāta samādhi* (a nondual experience where there is no object) into *anubhava* and by extension into Śaṅkara's Advaita. Thus, *anubhava* becomes a unique mystical experience and a *pramāṇa* independent of the *śruti*. I believe this idea is unwarranted and lacking any basis in the Upaniṣads or in Śaṅkara's commentaries. As explained below, experiences such as Patañjali's *samādhi* do not play a role in Śaṅkara's conception of *brahmavidyā*. 567

Both Halbfass (1988) and Sharf (1998) note that premodern philosophers of Hinduism and Buddhism based the authority of their teachings on scripture and not on their personal experience. The contemporary emphasis on gaining experience by means of meditation may not have played such a central role in ancient religious practice. Furthermore, Halbfass argues that Vedic revelation "speaks in the mode of timeless

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It is also possible to identify *vijñāna* with *niṣṭhā*. If we identify it with *niṣṭhā* then by extension *aparokṣa* knowledge can be identified with *niṣṭhā*. This identification places the emphasis on clarity of knowledge rather then experiential immediacy.

[566] Halbfass 1991, pp. 389-90.

[567] Śaṅkara's critical attitude towards yogic experiences follows the opinions of Kumārila (Halbfass 1988, p. 388).
The insistence on mystical states was developed among neo-Vedāntins, particularly during the Hindu renaissance in Bengal during the late nineteenth century and has become the norm in many contemporary popular Advaita traditions.

presence. Its words are not articulations of experiences, and they are not subsequent and subordinate to an awareness of meanings, but prior to such awareness—not only insofar as their validity is concerned, but even from a temporal and psychological angle."[568]

The recent scholarly debates over *anubhava* mostly revolve around one significant passage in Śaṅkara's commentary on BS 1.1.2.[569] This passage begins as a response to an opponent who claims that inference alone is sufficient to establish *brahman* due to the authority of the second *sūtra*, "That (is Brahman) from which (are derived) the birth etc. of this (universe)."[570] In his reply, Śaṅkara writes:

> The knowledge (*avagati*) of *brahman* is accomplished by determination through inquiry into the meaning of the (Upaniṣad) sentences, but not accomplished by other means of knowledge such as inference, etc. But when there are Upaniṣad sentences speaking of the birth, etc. of the world, then inference, being a means of knowledge that does not contradict the Upaniṣadic sentences, is not prohibited as a means for strengthening the understanding of those sentences because the *śruti* accepts reasoning as a help. Therefore there are sentences such as 'The self is to be heard, to be reflected on…' (BU 2.4.5) and 'An intelligent and informed man would reach Gandhāra, in the same way a man who possesses a teacher gains knowledge' (CU 6.14.2). Thus the intelligence of a person assists the *śruti*.
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> *Śruti*, etc. are not the only means of knowledge in the inquiry into *brahman* as in the inquiry into *dharma*. Moreover *śruti*, etc. and *anubhava*, etc. as far as possible[571] are the means of knowledge here because *anubhava* is the

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568 Halbfass 1988, p.392.
569 Halbfass (1988) mentions this passage in his seminal article, "The Concept of Experience in the Encounter of India and the West," which discusses the problem of *anubhava* and its misappropriation among neo-Vedānta. An important discussion of this passage took place in the *Journal East & West*, in which Arvind Sharma (1992) discusses this passage and (1993) criticizes Anantanand Rambachan's position on *anubhava* in a book review of Rambachan's "Accomplishing the Accomplished." Rambachan (1994) responded to Sharma to refute the criticism. Previous to this discussion Rambachan wrote about *anubhava* in the *Journal East & West* (1986) and K. N Upadhyaya discusses Rambachan's position in the *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (1991). Kim Skoog (1993), Michael Comans (2000), and Forsthoefel (2002) among others, have discussed the problem of *anubhava*.
570 *janmādyasya yataḥ.* Gambhirananda 1996, p. 13.
It is important to note that Śaṅkara's introduction and commentary on the *catuḥ-sūtrī* (the first four *sūtras* of the *Brahmasūtras*) is arguably his most influential piece of writing.
571 *yathāsambhavam* is a problematic phrase here and its translation can change the interpretation of the passage. See Sharma 1992, p. 521 for a discussion of this.

> culmination of *brahman* knowledge and because it (*brahman*) is an existing object. If the object is something to be accomplished then *anubhava* is not necessary and texts, etc. alone would be the means of knowledge. And because what is to be accomplished is produced by human effort. Conventional and Vedic action can be done, not done, or done otherwise.[572]

The pertinent question this passage raises is what Śaṅkara means by *anubhava* here. Does he believe that *anubhava* is a valid *pramāṇa* independent of the *śruti*? In the previous chapters I explained why the *śruti* is an independent means of self-knowledge for Śaṅkara; however, the wording in the second paragraph of the passage appears to contradict the sole authority of the *śruti* by placing equal emphasis on *anubhava*. Accordingly, a number of scholars interpret this passage to argue that for Śaṅkara, *anubhava* is an independent *pramāṇa* for self-knowledge. For example, Arvind Sharma claims that *anubhava* cannot be made subservient to the *śruti* because Śaṅkara uses "*śruti*, etc." and "*anubhava*, etc." in the same line.[573] He explicitly argues that *śruti* is not the only *pramāṇa* for *brahman*, and that this passage shows that *anubhava* is a *pramāṇa* and a direct exception to the *śruti*.[574]

Anantanand Rambachan on the other hand, argues in his response to Sharma that *anubhava* should be understood like inference as supplementary to the *śruti* and not as an

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572 *vākyārthavicāraṇādhavasānanirvṛttā hi brahmāvagatir nānumānādipramāṇāntaranirvṛttā | satsu tu vedāntavākyeṣu jagato janmādikāraṇavādiṣu tadarthagrahaṇadārḍhyāyānumānam api vedāntavākyāvirodhi pramāṇaṁ bhavan na nirvāryate, śrutyaiva ca sahāyatvena tarkasyābhyupetatvāt | tathāhi 'śrotavyaḥ mantavyaḥ' iti srutiḥ 'paṇḍito medhāvī gandhārān evopasaṁpadyetaivam evehācāryavān puruṣo veda' iti ca puruṣabudhisāhāyyam ātmano darśayati | na darmajiñāsāyām iva śrutyādaya eva pramāṇam brahmajijñāsāyām | kiṁ tu śrutyādayo 'nubhavādayaś ca yathāsaṁbhavam iha pramāṇaṁ anubhavāvasānatvād bhūtavastuviṣayatvāc ca brahmajñānasya | kartavye hi viṣaye nānubhavāpekṣāstīti śrutyādīnām eva prāmāṇyaṁ syāt puruṣādhīnātmalābatvāc ca kartavyasya | kartum akartum anyathā vā kartuṁ śakyaṁ laukikaṁ vaidikaṁ ca karma…|* (my translation).
573 Sharma 1993, p. 741. Also see Skoog 1993, p. 71.
574 Sharma 1993, p. 742.

alternative *pramāṇa*. Using the traditional Mīmāṁsaka exegetical strategy of *upakrama* (beginning) and *upasamhāra* (conclusion) as a means to find the textual purport based on the conceptual cohesion between the introduction and conclusion, Rambachan demonstrates that Sharma's interpretation contradicts the context of Śaṅkara's commentary. Śaṅkara explicitly denies the independent capacity for knowing *brahman* for any *pramāṇa* other than the Upaniṣads at the conclusion of his commentary on BS1.1.2.[575] This denial should also exclude *anubhava*.[576] In fact, in BS 1.1.2, as well as numerous other places, he accepts reasoning as an aid to self-knowledge only when it is based on or in accordance with the *śruti*. Dry logic (*śuṣka-tarka*) independent of *śruti* is unacceptable to him in the pursuit of self-knowledge. In the BG passages it is also clear that *anubhava* is directly dependent on the Upaniṣads and *śravaṇa*.

Furthermore, if we posit *anubhava* as an independent *pramāṇa* based on this passage then we must also include other *pramāṇas* like inference due to the addition of etc. (*ādi*) to *anubhava*; yet this is certainly not acceptable to Śaṅkara. The *ādi* includes other *pramāṇas* but in the larger context of making them subordinate to *śruti*.[577] According to Rambachan's argument, it is evident that Śaṅkara did not intend to distinguish *anubhava* and *śruti* as two distinct *pramāṇa*s capable of providing self-knowledge.

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[575] Rambachan 1994, pp. 721-2. Rambachan also discusses flaws in Sharma's interpretation of *anubhava* in BS 2.1.4, where Śaṅkara does not make an exception for *anubhava* as a *pramāṇa*.

[576] Furthermore, there is no *pramāṇa* called *anubhava* unless we identify it with direct perception, but this is obvious not the context of external perception. Even if internal perception, then it is simply *sākśī pratyakṣa*. Where is the knowledge? This is why it leads to experience hunting and mysticism, because one must posit *anubhava* as a mystical experience that somehow negates ignorance and is an independent *pramāṇa*.

The question still remains, what is this *anubhava* indicated by Śaṅkara if it is not an independent *pramāṇa*? In this passage Śaṅkara clearly says *anubhava* is the culmination of self-knowledge. *Anubhava* is not the source or cause of *brahmavidyā*, it is the *brahmvidyā* itself which eliminates ignorance. The *śruti* is the means, and *anubhava* is the end of some kind of self-knowing process.[578] I believe that Śaṅkara uses the term in the same way while glossing *vijñāna* in the BG *ślokas*. And if we identify *vijñāna* as *aparokṣa* knowledge, then we can also identify *anubhava* as immediate self-knowledge or self-consciousness. The removal of ignorance and obstacles to self-knowledge is a negative process, which is not producing anything new or accomplishing something through action. However, due to the perspective that *aparokṣatva* is always present, I believe it is more accurate to use the terms *jñāna* and *vijñāna* instead of *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa*.

Anubhava according to Śaṅkara is a cognition of *brahman* produced through the *śruti*. It is the clear and assimilated understanding of *brahmavidyā* through the Upaniṣads. Whether this happens merely through hearing or through a longer triple study process is not relevant to trying to separate *anubhava* and *śruti* in Śaṅkara's thought. From this perspective *anubhava* may be viewed as non-separate from the *śruti* in the sense that it depends on knowledge from the *śruti*.[579] This is not to say that some

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577 Rambachan 1986, p. 36.

578 Also see BGbh 18.55.

579 Accordingly, some later Advaitins such as Madhusūdhana Saraswati say that one gains *aparokṣa* knowledge from the first time they listen to the *śruti*, though he makes an interesting distinction between *aparokṣa* knowledge and the direct knowledge (*sakṣātkāra*) culminating at the end of the study process (see *Advaitaratnarakṣanam,* p. 44). By claiming *aparoksa* knowledge from the beginning, Madhūsdana affirms

experience or absence of experience occurs simultaneously with self-knowledge or as a result following in the wake of self-knowledge according to Śaṅkara.[580] We may or may not posit some type of *nirvikalpa* (non-dual or without division) experience as part of *anubhava* as *brahmavidyā* in Śaṅkara's understanding. But regardless, I believe a *nirvikalpa* experience is not the primary denotation of the term for Śaṅkara, because he believes such experiences can ostensibly occur without *brahmavidyā*. It would make better sense to claim that the important aspect of Śaṅkara's *anubhava* is not the mental state one achieves but the immediate destruction of ignorance and direct recognition of *brahman*. This is seen in other instances where Śaṅkara uses the term *anubhava*, as in the BG verses above in his explanation of *vijñāna*. Another example is BS 4.1.2 where Śaṅkara employs *anubhava* and *pratipatti* (understanding) interchangeably.[581] In US 18.213-14 Śañkara clearly states that *anubhava* is the knowledge resulting from a means of knowledge consisting of sentences such as *tat tvam asi*.[582] It is prudent then, in order to follow Śaṅkara, to restrict the primary meaning of *anubhava* in his usages to self-knowledge rather than some form of mystical experience, and to understand it as depending on the Upaniṣads rather than as an independent source of knowledge.

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the *śruti* as the means of knowledge and that *anubhava* is a part of the *śabda pramāṇa*, while also recognizing there is a process and a culminating *vṛtti* for removing ignorance.

[580] One may argue that all types of knowledge are forms of experience, so such a distinction is superfluous. This is true in the Advaita view, but the distinction Śaṅkara makes goes back to the concepts of object dependent (*vastu-tantra*) knowledge and person dependent (*puruṣa-tantra*) action discussed earlier. All experience is knowledge (in the general sense of the term) but not necessarily valid knowledge (*pramā*).

[581] See Comans 2000, p. 311.
Often times Śaṅkara defines liberation as right vision (*samyag darśana*), but *darśana* does not refer to experience. Śaṅkara defines *samyag darśana* as knowledge (*pratipatti*) of self as *brahman* (BSbh 4.1.12).

[582] Also see US 18.218. In his commentary, Ānandagiri writes "*Anubhava,* which is *aparokṣa* and non-relational (*asamsṛṣṭa*) is born from the sentence."

Śaṅkara brings up both the *śruti* and *anubhava* in the same sentence in the long passage quoted above (BSbh 1.1.2) not to place special importance on some mystical or transcendent state of consciousness, but in order to separate self-knowledge from the realm of ritual action. Both self-knowledge and ritual knowledge depend on the *śruti*, but self-knowledge is intrinsically immediate while ritual knowledge is intrinsically *parokṣa*, concerning the future. His point is to reiterate that self-knowledge is not something new to accomplish and deals with an existing entity that is known immediately, unlike ritual action, which produces a future unseen result.[583] Śaṅkara separates self-knowledge from ritual because it reveals an existing object (*bhūta-vastu*) rather than a future object (*bhavya-vastu*), and is dependent on that object (*vastu-tantra*) rather than the person's will (*puruṣa-tantra*).[584] In this context, *anubhava* is used to emphasize the immediacy of the direct knowledge, which is appropriate for an immediate existing entity.

If *anubhava* is the result of understanding the Upaniṣads, then why does Śaṅkara associate *anubhava* with inference and other means to strengthen or clarify self-knowledge? That hearing may not be enough is understood in the BSbh 1.1.2 passage. In fact Śaṅkara brings in *manana* from BU 2.4.5 as textual evidence that reasoning in line with *śruti* may be necessary to strengthen knowledge. Evidently then, Śaṅkara recognizes that even after *śravaṇa*, one's knowledge may be deficient or obstructed and not self-evident to the practitioner. Then reasoning and contemplation are required for

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583 This idea is explained in detail earlier in the action-knowledge section.
Advaitins mean this in two primary ways: 1) it is not accomplished like any object of knowledge – like in perception. And 2) not accomplished because it is identical with *caitanyam* and therefore eternal.

584 Recall the discussion of *puruṣatantra* action and *vastutantra* knowledge in the *upāsanā* section in chapter two.

greater clarity and finally for *brahmavidyā*. From this perspective, as Rambachan argues, *anubhava* plays a supplementary role to the *śruti*; however, it is somewhat confusing to associate *anubhava* (as the culmination of *brahmavidyā*) with inference. Inference is used to help strengthen knowledge, but one would assume *anubhava* does not strengthen self-knowledge because it is the result of strengthening, the culmination of self-knowledge. In our interpretation of Śaṅkara, with *anubhava* (or *vijñāna*) one's clarity is absolute and self-evident. At this point there is no need for further inquiry into the truth of the *śruti*. One has complete conviction, no more doubts, and *brahmvidyā* shines clearly in one's mind. *Anubhava* marks this point of absolute clarity where *brahmavidyā* is self-evident and non-propositional. But it is important to note that Śaṅkara is not pointing to *anubhava* as a phenomenological state for validating theoretical *parokṣa* knowledge gained from the *śruti*. *Anubhava* is also not a proof of *brahman* or a validation of the *śruti*. Once one has *brahamvidyā* there is no need for proof.[585]

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[585] Potter 1981, p. 98.

5.5.3: Paradoxes and Different Levels of Discourse

The nature of *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* knowledge and the nature of the liberating cognition of direct insight as taught by Śaṅkara gives rise to a number of paradoxes. For the sake of discussion, I divide some potential usages of *anubhava* into three levels of discourse: (1) in empirical discourse it signifies experiences, usually direct external perceptual experience or the internal perceptual experience of states of consciousness, thoughts, and emotions;[586] (2) In metaphysical discourse it means *ātman* as absolute non-dual self-luminous consciousness, the underlying basis and witness of every experience, which is unattached and not limited to any single individual;[587] and (3) in metaphysical discourse it also means the immediate culminating cognition of *brahmavidyā* that destroys self-ignorance and is synonymous with liberation.[588]

Talking both of empirical and metaphysical absolute of *anubhava* lends itself to confusion. Speaking of an ignorance-removing cognition occurring in time as *aparokṣajñāna* or *anubhava* refers to the conventional level of an individual's knowing process in my understanding. It is produced through a means of knowledge, and self-destructs after it releases its content. When Advaitins speak of *aparokṣajñāna* or *anubhava* as the intrinsic nature of *ātman* and as self-illuminating consciousness, such usage refers to absolute reality, which is always present, constant, and unchanging. From the absolute perspective, immediacy is the constant nature of one's self and common for all individuals.

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[586] For example, Śaṅkara on BS 2.2.29.
[587] US 18.104.

Advaitins cannot ultimately categorize liberation discretely because it is held to be indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*), to further complicate matters. The liberating cognition allows one to see through the appearance of knower and known and remains only as undifferentiated consciousness and being after revealing *brahman*. In this transition, the soteriological discourse moves from viewing the cognition from an empirical standpoint as occurrent knowledge (*vṛttijñāna*) to an absolute one of *brahman's* intrinsic undifferentiated nature (*svarūpajñāna*). It is as though there is a leap from the empirical to the absolute in the movement from the propositional form of the cognition to its non-propositional one that transcends any form.[589]

On the other hand, the immediate nature (*aparokṣatva*) of one's self never changes and is never produced. In reality there is no change whatsoever. The leap is only in one's understanding, from what appears to be propositional self-knowledge to the non-propositional self-knowledge which was always available and evident as the self, but veiled due to one's self-ignorance and lack of qualification (*adhikāra*). Penetrating this appearance of propositional knowledge is akin to seeing through the appearance of *māyā*. Even the possessive pronoun referring to a knower has no reference at the same time, so that the phrase "one's self-knowledge" becomes a contradiction.[590] In self-knowledge there is a cognition to recognize immediacy (*aparokṣatva*), but liberation is identical with

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588 As in the passage under discussion, BS 1.1.2.

589 Part of the issue is that as a *vṛtti* we want to say it possesses form, but if we identify form and content, in the Advaita theory of perception that the mind takes the shape of the object of knowledge (like in the case of knowledge of a pot), then what form can *aparokṣa brahman vṛtti* have? Therefore it is formless.

590 This points to one of the conceptual paradoxes of *jīvanmukti*. The *jīvanmukta* has no true individuality so say "my knowledge"; yet at the same time the *jīvanmukti* continues an individual existence despite recognizing his or her true nature as *brahman*.

immediacy at the same time. The immediacy is not an object grasped by the cognition and immediate *anubhava* is not localized any more after *brahmavidyā*. *Aparokṣatva* of the self does not occur in time because one is already intrinsically free, but the *brahmavidyā* must occur for one to recognize that fact. This sets up a paradox of sorts, because liberation occurs in time yet never occurs because it is already present in the mainstream Advaita view. This may be incomprehensible to the ignorant person, but after knowledge the liberated individual (*jñānin*) ideally recognizes that liberation never took place at all. The main Advaita tool for unraveling this paradox is to switch between conventional and absolute levels of reality in the meanings of the terms. Statements such as, "Awareness at the empirical level must be realized at the transcendent level" or "*Śruti* is a *pramāṇa* for the conventional level and *anubhava* is for the transcendent level" are nonsensical and only create confusion. Within Śaṅkara's system it is more accurate to say that there is no real jumping levels of reality in self-knowledge

Despite my interpretation of *anubhava*, my intention is not to dismiss important transformative experiences that the Advaitin may ostensibly have due to liberation. There may be a number of changes that take place in the *jīvanmukta's* (one who is liberated while living) psyche in response to liberating *brahmavidyā*. His or her mind recognizes that it is illumined and not a finite vulnerable entity. The mind can rest, secure in its knowledge that its true identity is not a fragile body and ego that are subject to approaching death. This provides emotional space and is a powerful coping mechanism because the mind is no longer an isolated finite entity that runs in survival mode in fear of its own mortality and in fear of others due to a vision of difference. Perhaps a number of

other positive changes may occur in the mind after ignorance is removed because the mind can relax, let go of past trauma and insecurities, and develop new levels of emotional maturity. Some of these changes may be radical, powerful, and transformative. They should not be ignored, yet it is mistaken to identify them with self-knowledge.

Trying to describe this situation is problematic. On one hand the Advaitin must not discount the transformative experiences of the psyche after self-knowledge or the process of deepening clarity through dedicated study necessary for self-knowledge. And this clarity is certainly experienced differently than a lack of clarity. Yet in the final analysis, there is no new experience of one's self. Both sides of this issue need to be understood. The Advaitin must focus on studying for otherwise he or she remains ignorant. Yet the student must also understand that "knowledge" is nothing new and not a personal experience, otherwise he or she will hunt for new experiences with the false assumption that such experiences constitute *brahmavidyā*. I don't believe Śaṅkara's intention is to negate the various mystical experiences, awakenings, devotional states, and psychological breakthroughs that may arise in the course of studying Vedānta or other traditions. Such experiences may serve important functions such as mental purification, emotional growth, or inspiration. Rather the point is to be absolutely clear on the nature of self-knowledge, its function of removing self-ignorance, and its source in the Upaniṣads; and in addition, to negate the mistaken tendency to attribute *pramāṇatva* to other phenomena such as experiences or practices such as meditation.

After recognizing some of the details and difficulties of maintaining a distinction between *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* self-knowledge, I believe we have two basic options with reference to how we interpret it. We can take a polemical stance and completely dismiss this distinction as conflicting with Advaita's epistemology and the metaphysical position of self-illumination. Or, we can accept a more empathetic interpretation that attempts to properly understand *parokṣa* and *aparokṣa* self-knowledge in a way that is faithful to Śaṅkara's Advaita. The empathetic interpretation recognizes a growing and deepening change of clarity, which includes the assimilation of wisdom, removing various obstacles, and eventually leading to the removal of ignorance and any problematic habitual tendencies. Yet this stance continues to uphold the *śruti* as a *pramāṇa* and dismisses any emphasis on *anubhava* as an alternative *pramāṇa* or as a mystical experience. In this interpretation, even if immediate knowledge free of any deficiencies may not occur through *śravaṇa* alone, the Advaitin in my reading must expand the domain of the *śabda pramāṇa* to encompass the supplementary roles of *manana* and *nididhyāsana*, as well as the culminating *anubhava*. The *śruti* in the form of knowledge is universal and primary throughout every part of this process.

Our discussion of *anubhava* helps us to understand the function of *nididhyāsana*. *Nididhyāsana* is part of the means for cultivating *anubhava* in the form of *brahmavidyā*. The dismissal of *anubhava* as an alternative *pramāṇa* or as a mystical experience means that *nididhyāsana* is not a means for mystical experience, and is not necessary for creating an experience which functions independently as a *pramāṇa*. As I have explained repeatedly, Śaṅkara views *nididhyāsana* as a mode of studying *śruti*, and *anubhava* as

brahmavidā, a deep understanding of *śruti*. If so, then Śaṅkara understands these all to be modes of the *śruti*, or inversely, he is expanding the semantic range of *śruti* to include both *nididhāsana* and *anubhava*. Thus, *nididhyāsana* does not produce a transcendental experience nor is *nididhyāsana* an independent means for gaining the knowledge cognition. Rather, *nididhyāsana* functions as a means to deepen one's understanding of *brahman* by removing obstacles to *brahmavidyā*. Śaṅkara purposely places more emphasis on *śruti* than on *nididhyāsana*. If one insists on the importance of *nididhyāsana* by pointing out the difficulties students typically face in gaining *brahmavidyā* after having only listened, then Śaṅkara can respond by accepting *nididhyāsana* as an advanced mode of Upaniṣadic study completely dependent on *śruti* and included within the domain of *śravaṇa*.

5.5.4: *Nididhyāsana* and *samādhi*

Is it possible to identify *nididhyāsana* with Yoga's highest state of concentration, *samādhi*? To answer this question we need to look at Śaṅkara's view of *samādhi*. In Patañjali' Yoga system, *asamprajñāta samādhi,* also known as *nirvikalpa samādhi*, is a state where all fluctuations of the mind are suppressed and at rest and there is no more distinction of subject and object. Only latent tendencies (*saṁskāra*s) remain in the mind, which accounts for the ability of the individual to return to the waking state and have thoughts again. Yogins usually identify *asamprajñāta samādhi* as the means for gaining Yoga's liberation, known as "isolation" (*kaivalya*). In *kaivalya* the yogin is perfectly isolated and distinct from matter (*prakṛti*) and identified with pure awareness (*puruṣa*).

As some scholars have correctly argued, during the past century a number of neo-Vedāntins appropriated the term *nirvikalpa samādhi* and placed far greater importance on Yoga's *samādhi* experience as the means for liberation or as the final culmination for understanding non-duality, than on studying the Upaniṣads.[591] In doing so they conflated Yoga's *samādhi* with Śaṅkara's *brahmavidyā*. This conflation subsequently influenced many scholars to hold the same opinion. However, the appropriation of some form of *samādhi* (not necessarily Yoga's) existed in earlier historical periods. Various Advaitins, such as Sadānanda (ca. 1450 CE), the author of the *Vedāntasāra*, place an emphasis on *samādhi* that is not found in Śaṅkara's writing.

Though the term *samādhi* occurs in the *Bhagavadgītā*, it does not occur in the Upaniṣads. Unfortunately Śaṅkara himself does not make his understanding of *samādhi* clear because he does not explicitly explain it in his commentaries. *Samādhi* comes from the verb *samādhā* (*sam* + *ā* + *dhā*), which means, "to put together," "to unite," or "to concentrate." The closest term we find in the Upanisads is *samāhita*. Śaṅkara generally interprets *samāhita*, or the related word *samādhāna*, as a collected mind, which can withdraw from objects and maintain one pointed concentration (*ekāgratā*).[592] This is closer to Yoga's use of *dhāraṇā* or *dhyāna* and comprises part of the preliminary steps that lead to gaining mental purification in both Advaita and Yoga.[593] In other places Śaṅkara uses *samādhi* in various ways, potentially as liberation itself, as a means of yoga,

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591 Comans 1993, Rambachan 1994, and Halbfass 1988.
592 Comans 1993 p. 22.
See US 13.17, 13.25, BU 4.2.1, 4.4.23.
593 Occasionally Śaṅkara also uses *samādhi* to specifically denote *dhāraṇā*. See BGbh 18.33.

as *nididhyāsana*, as steadfastness in knowledge (*jñānaniṣṭha*), as well as Yoga's *asamprajñāta* state.[594]

The question of the relationship between *nididhyāsana* and *samādhi* states is a tricky one because Śaṅkara does not clarify what he means by *samādhi* in his commentaries. In some cases, it is Yoga's *asamprajñāta samādhi*; however, this is probably not his usage of it in the context of his description of Advaita's method of study and of *nididhyāsana*. In a number of places Śaṅkara appears to equate *samādhi* with the process of gaining knowledge, which we can equate with the triple process, particularly *nididhyāsana*. This is most evident in the *Bhagavadgītā* commentary. In BGbh 6.19 Śaṅkara defines the one who practices yoga as one who practices *samādhi* regarding the self. In BGbh 2.39 and 4.38 he makes a distinction between *karma yoga* and *samādhi yoga*, which is the direct path to steadfastness (*niṣṭha*). In BGbh 2.54 he refers to the *sthita prajña* (the one who is steadfast in knowledge) as engaged in *samādhi*.

Elsewhere, in GK 3.37, Gaudapada defines the self as *samādhi*. In his gloss, Śaṅkara writes that it is called *samādhi* "because the self is understood by the wisdom caused by *samādhi*."[595] And perhaps most importantly, in BSbh 2.3.39, he writes,

> This *samādhi* which is taught in the Upaniṣads is the means for knowledge of the Upaniṣadic self in such sentences as, "The self should be seen should be heard should be reflected on " (BU2.4.5) and "That is the self that you should try to

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594 In BG 6.29 *samāhita* equals the word *jñāna* and *samadarśa* and seeing oneness. This is leading to liberation, not usually liberation itself. Also identified with *abhyāsa* in BG Ch. 6 (or at least as *anutiṣṭhataḥ* in BG 6.19).

595 *samādhinimittaprajñāvagamyatvāt* (my translation).

discover, that is the self that you should seek to perceive" (CU 8.7.1)," and "*Om* – meditate thus on the self (MU 2.2.6)."[596]

This passage identifies *samādhi* with the meaning of three of the primary sentences that Śaṅkara understands as meaning *nididhyāsana*, particularly CU 8.7.1 which refers solely to *nididhyāsana*. In some of the other above attestations it is difficult to isolate the association of *samādhi* with *nididhyāsana* alone, rather than with *śravaṇa* and *manana*, and so it could refer to the general process of Advaita's study process. One could also argue that it may be possible to restrict the meaning of *samādhi* to having a one-pointed mind, and/or a mind withdrawn from all objects. However, the fact that in these textual contexts *samādhi* is said to be intimately connected to the means of self-knowledge surely excludes it from being a simple experience and points to something more than basic concentration and yogic meditation (*dhyāna*, or *ekāgratā*) in Śaṅkara's opinion. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, Śaṅkara believes that such practices are forms of action and devoid of any self-knowledge and primarily useful for preparing and purifying the student's mind. The practice of *samādhi* at least in the Gkbh requires both withdrawal and self-knowledge from negation and *anvaya/vyatireka* at the same time.[597] When we consider that *samādhi* also denotes forms of deep concentration, it is likely that in these contexts it points more towards *nididhyāsana*, rather than *śravaṇa* and *manana* which do not require the same types of meditative practices.

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596 *yo 'py ayam aupaniṣadātmapratipattiprayojanaḥ samādhir upadiṣṭo vedānteṣu ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyaḥ mantavyaḥ nididhyāsitavyaḥ so 'nveṣṭavyaḥ sa vijijñāstitavyaḥ,' 'om ity evaṁ dhyāyatha ātmānam'* (my translation).
This *sūtra* is not the definitive view in the discussion but there is a clear association between *samādhi* and *nididhyāsana*.
597 For example, see GKbh 3.31-48 and *anvaya-vyatireka* and *neti neti* in 3.26.

Śaṅkara does not see Yoga's *samādhi* mental state as the means to liberation or the culmination of liberation, but his intention is not to negate the very possibility of *samādhi*. He acknowledges and accepts it as a possible experience. There are also some Upanisadic passages which appear to advocate some type of *samādhi* state or that point out the absence of perception in liberation as in deep sleep. Śaṅkara points out the absence of perception in knowledge in passages such as the following:[598]

> When, however, the Whole has become one's very self (*ātman*), then who is there for one to smell and by what means? Who is there for one to see and by what means? Who is there for one to hear and by what means? Who is there for one to see and by what means? Who is there for one to hear and by what means? Who is there for one to greet and by what means? Who is there for one to think and by what means. Who is there for one to perceive and by what means? (BU 2.4.14)[599]
>
> It is like this. As a man embraced by a woman he loves is oblivious to everything within or without, so this person embraced by the self (*ātman*) consisting of knowledge is oblivious to everything within or without (BU 4.3.21).[600]
>
> The infinite is that where one does not see anything else, does not hear anything else, and does not understand anything else (CU 7.24.1).[601]

However, Śaṅkara clearly does not approve of Yoga's *asamprajñāta samādhi* as the ultimate goal. For example, in BSbh 2.1.9 he writes:

> As in natural slumber and *samādhi*, though there is a natural eradication of differences, still owing to the persistence of the unreal nescience, differences occur over again when one wakes up."[602]

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598 Śaṅkara cites BU 2.4.14, BU 4.3.21 and CU 7.24.1 together in BUbh 3.9.28.7.
599 Olivelle 1996, p. 30. This passage is repeated in BU 4.5.15.
600 Olivelle 1996 p. 61. The Upaniṣad seems to refer to deep sleep in this example, but Śaṅkara also associates it with liberation.
601 Gambhirananda 1992, p. 558.
602 Gambhirananda 1996, p. 319.

In this passage Śaṅkara recognizes *samādhi* as a phenomenological state similar to deep sleep. In both these states there is an absence of any duality where there is no self or object. [603] They are also similar because neither one leads to knowledge. Just as one's ignorance continues to exist after waking, so does self-ignorance continue for the one coming out of *samādhi*. Śaṅkara is not impressed with *samādhi* even though it may be an exalted mystical experience. The fundamental deficiency is that knowledge that removes ignorance is not possible in either *samādhi* or deep dreamless sleep, and for Śaṅkara, self-knowledge alone is the solution. Neither state is generated through a *pramāṇa*, but only though mental processes and suppression. If in fact there is no duality available in this experience and no agent to apperceive it then there can be no knowledge either. In fact, one could argue that people experience silence between any two consecutive thoughts. If mental silence were the sole requisite for liberation, then every individual would already have self-knowledge. One may also argue that it is not possible to claim that memory can take place during this state. How could one even know or remember that he or she was in a *samādhi* state?

There are some other potential Advaita critiques of Yoga's *samādhi*. For Advaitins, the self is the cause and existence of every thought; thus, thoughts are not separate from the self and cannot create a true obstruction dividing the self and individual. Thoughts need not be destroyed in order to know their reality, just as one does not need to break a pot in order to understand that the pot space is identical with

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[603] He also makes this identification in BGbh 18.66.

universal space.[604] In fact we saw that in KeUbh 2.4 and 4.5 Śaṅkara uses thoughts as a way to point back to one's *ātman* in contemplation. But according to the Yogic theory of *samādhi*, thoughts in the mind are ultimately real and must be extinguished to find the self. Even if *samādhi* does lead to some type of self-knowledge, this would be the knowledge that Yogins seek, which affirms the absolute dualism of awareness (*puruṣa*) and matter (*prakṛti*) underpinning Yoga metaphysics. Why would the Advaitin seek out or accept *samādhi* when it does not lead to non-duality but to the idea that *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* are equally real and distinct? Yoga's *asamprajñāta samādhi* is a *nirvikalpa* experience that gives *saguṇa* knowledge, if any, and affirms the duality of the world.[605]

5.6: The Function of *nididhyāsana*

As explained earlier, *brahmavidyā* is imparted to the student by listening to the Upaniṣads. The rest of the triple process is focused on removing the obstructions to that self-knowledge, specifically doubts regarding the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa śaṅka*s) and doubts regarding the object of knowledge (*prameya śaṅka*s). *Śravaṇa* is alone capable of liberating an individual by removing all doubts about the object of knowledge (*prameya śaṅka*s). *Śravaṇa* along with *manana*, which removes doubts about the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa śaṅka*s), should provide definite self-knowledge, a type of unshakeable conviction that cannot be dislodged by doubt; however, as noted earlier, one of the mysteries we continue to encounter in Śaṅkara's thinking is whether we can label this definite knowledge as immediate *brahmavidyā* or as some form of deficient

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[604] Śaṅkara rejects the method of suppression of thoughts as a means to liberation in BUbh 1.4.7.

[605] Comans 1993, p. 28. See BSbh 2.1.3.

propositional self-knowledge, of if such distinctions are even appropriate for understanding Śaṅkara. However, in some cases, when *śravaṇa* and *manana* are not adequate, then *nididhyāsana* is necessary to neutralize obstacles that are blocking self-knowledge despite properly studying the Upaniṣads with a qualified teacher and having a high level of *adhikāritva*.

5.6.1: Resolving Contradictory Patterns, Impressions, and Dispositions

Previous conditioned beliefs of oneself as finite, limited, and intrinsically separated from the surrounding world may cause habitual reflexive and reactive thought patterns. These habitual thought patterns, variously called *viparītabhāvanā, viparītapratyaya,*[606] *saṁskāra, vāsanā, kaśaya*,[607] *kleśa*,[608] or *kalmaśa*[609] persist as traces, impressions, dispositions, or tendencies from earlier actions and longstanding identifications. Within the broader system of Advaita, *saṁskāra*s are variously understood as some type of psychological seed, subconscious impression, trace, tendency, affective disposition, or karmic residue that are created by previous actions and longstanding identifications. They persist after actions and function as causal mechanisms for memory, error, positive or negative habits, psychological afflictions, pleasure and pain, further action and the production of dreams. In a separate, yet related function, they comprise part of the subtle body and are closely related to *karma*, determining the nature of future births. However, in the context of self-knowledge they

[606] BUbh 1.4.10.
[607] GK 3.44.
[608] BSbh 4.2.7.
[609] BG 5.17, 6.27-8.

play a specific role as a unique class of obstacles that reinforce notions of duality or limited self-identities and disturb one's understanding of non-duality.[610] They are secondary obstacles, not as direct as doubts about *brahman* and the means of knowledge, and more ambiguous and subtle, but powerful nonetheless and capable of obstructing the *śabda pramāṇa* from functioning properly. *Nididhyāsana* is a particular method for cultivating maturity in self-knowledge by resolving these habitual contradictory thought patterns and preventing further ones.[611] With repetition it cultivates stability in self-knowledge (*jṇānaniṣṭhā* or *sthitaprajnā*), so that self-identity as *brahman* is always available and immediately evident.[612]

Śaṅkara does not clearly define these obstacles or articulate the way in which *nididhyāsana* removes them and perhaps only grudgingly admits to the existences of these obstacles, but he does use a variety of terms for them and assumes a familiarity with such terms on the part of the reader. This category of obstacles does not fit easily into his epistemology because its relationship with ignorance is not clear. The problem is not only explaining why such obstacles exist but also why they should have any effect of destabilizing knowledge if one has already directly recognized *brahman*. As we will see, there are also some problems reconciling the theory of *saṁskāra*s with the doctrine of

[610] See Śaṅkara on BU 1.4.7, 1.4.10; GK 3.44; BS 4.1.15, 3.4.26, 3.4.47-48, 3.4.51; and BG 4.18, 5.13

Some Advaitins also say *nididhyāsana* removes *asambhāvanā*s. I think *asambhāvanā*s is a type of "difficulty in comprehension" similar to or directly connected to *viparītabhāvanā*s because it cannot be a *prameya śaṅka*, which is the domain of *manana* (translating it as improbability or impossibility does not make contextual sense).

[611] Mental purification is for gaining proper qualification so the *pramāṇa* can function properly. *Nididhyāsana* and *manana* may be viewed as a type of mental purification, but they are intrinsically unique because of their content and dependence on the Upaniṣads.

[612] See Śaṅkara on BGbh 2.54-72, 3.4, 3.17, 5.17, 5.20, 18.55; BSbh 3.4.20; MUbh 1.2.12, 3.25-6.

jīvanmukti (living while liberated). In addition, in some places Śaṅkara appears to refute the theory of *saṁskāra*s. For example in US 18.13, Śaṅkara specifically raises the theory of *saṁskāra* and rejects it as part of an opponent's position endorsing the *prasaṅkhyāna* contemplation. The theory of *saṁskāra* is also a key aspect of Maṇḍana Miśra's understanding of contemplation in the *Brahmasiddhi*, a position criticized by Śaṅkara's disciple, Sureśvara. Nevertheless, in other contexts Śaṅkara accepts *saṁskāra*s as a serious obstacle that must be neutralized with contemplation. Analyzing *saṁskāra*s and their contexts yields important insights into the function of *nididhyāsana* and its potential paradoxes.

5.6.2: *Saṁskāra* in its contexts

Terms such as *saṁskāra* and *vāsanā* are common to almost all Indian philosophical and religious systems and have a diversity of usage, though for many traditions they function as subconscious mechanisms.[613] For example, in Yog ācāra Buddhism *vāsanā*s constitute the infinite seeds contained in the *ālayavijñāna* (storehouse consciousness) that simultaneously sprout as awareness and object of perception. In Nyāya, *saṁskāra*s may have a psychological reference or refer to certain qualities such as impetus, experiential (or mental) qualities, or elasticity as a physical property.[614] The brahmanical tradition also uses the term *saṁskāra* in other ways. For example, the *gṛhyasūtras* and *dharma* texts, prescribes a variety of *saṁskāra*s as sacraments and rites of passage that an individual must go through during life. And *saṁskāra* may mean

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[613] See Chapter 3 of Phillips' forthcoming book on Yoga for an overview of *saṁskāra*s in yoga as well as other Indian philosophies. Also see Whichter 2005, pp. 601-630.

"purification" in a variety of ritual contexts. These can include such events as purifying ritual utensils or purificatory rites of passage, such as those at birth, the thread ceremony (*upanayanam*), and many others used within the classical *āśrama* system.[615] *Saṁskāra* meaning a rite or purification is homonymous with *saṁskāra* as a disposition, yet they are related in that ritual and purifying *saṁskāra*s make the individual different and thus add something.

An extensive discussion of psychological *saṁskāra*s comes in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*. A brief description of *saṁskāra*s in classical yoga is helpful and the most relevant discussion of *saṃskāra*s outside of Advaita when we consider Śaṅkara's acceptance of yogic praxis and his familiarity with the YS. In the YS, *saṁskāra*s or *vāsanā*s are latent impressions derived from previous actions, previous births, and experiences of pleasure and pain. They have no beginning and give rise to memory.[616] *Saṁskāra*s and *vāsanā*s, and the related term *karmāśaya*, are crucial concepts for Patañjali, particularly at the higher stages of Yoga praxis. One of the primary endeavors of the yogin is to burn up all *saṁskāra*s because *saṁskāra*s manifest as disturbing thoughts in the mind. Thoughts are a manifestation of matter (*prakṛti*). They disturb the yogin and keep him or her entangled with matter. Yogic practice is designed to create new *saṁskāra*s through its various practices such as nonharmfulness (*ahiṁsā*), meditation, etc, that in turn neutralize negative *saṁskāra*s and function to keep the yogin on the proper path. At higher stages of yoga praxis, *samprajñāta samādhi* and

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614 Phillips (forthcoming), p. 122, p. 165 fn.5.
615 Olivelle 1993, p. 126-8.

discriminative knowledge (*viveka khyāti*) create meditation *saṁskāra*s which inhibit impressions of empirical life.[617] Yet they also leave impressions in the mind, albeit helpful ones. *Saṁskāra*s, which exist independently of ceased cognition, remain even at the highest stage of mental cessation (*asamprajñāta samādhi*) when all thoughts are quieted.[618] These can cause subtle fluctuations of the mind that draw the yogin back into the material world. Therefore the yogin must repeatedly practice the complete cessation of mind (*nirodha*). *Nirodha* creates its own special *saṁskāra* that destroys any remaining *saṁskāra*s capable of disturbing *nirodha*, even those *saṁskāra*s produced by *samprajñāta samādhi*.[619] These *nirodha* produced *saṁskāra*s eventually self-destruct, burning themselves so no *saṁskāra*s exist whatsoever and the yogin can remain in a continuous state of *samādhi*.[620] This process of *saṁskāra* creation and negation occurs unperceived at a subconscious level unless the yogin has achieved high levels of sensitivity and is directly aware of his *saṁskāra*s.[621]

5.6.3: *Saṁskāra*s in Advaita Vedānta

For the most part, Advaitins uses the terms *saṁskāra*, *vāsanā*, and in some instances, *viparītabhāvanā* and *kaṣāya*, as synonyms. *Vāsanā* metaphorically refers to the lingering scent an object leaves behind, as in the case when garlic is removed from a vessel. An action, thought, or experience, similarly leaves a trace as an ingrained mental

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616 YSbh 2.13
617 YS 1.50
618 YS 1.18, 3.9
619 YS 1.51. Swāmi Hariharānanda Āraṇya 1983, pp. 259-60.
620 Also see YS 3.9-10.
621 YS 3.18

impression (or as an unseen potential metaphysical seed for a habit) in the mind and subtle body of the individual. Śaṅkara writes that, the subtle body "consists of impressions (*vāsanā*), and is produced by the impressions of gross and subtle objects and the union of the individual self."[622] Later in the same commentary he writes,

> As in life we have a cloth dyed with turmeric, so in the presence of objects of enjoyment the mind gets a similar colouring of impressions [*saṁskāra*], whence a man under such circumstances is said to be attached, as a cloth, for instance, is dyed. Also as sheep's wool is grey, so are some other forms of impressions.... The colouring varies sometimes according to the objects presented to the mind, and sometimes according to the tendencies of the mind itself.... It is impossible to ascertain the beginning, middle or end, or number, place, time and circumstances of these impressions, for they are innumerable, and infinite are their causes.[623]

Actions and their resulting experiences ingrain *saṁskāra*s. The mind contains a variety of different *saṁskāra*s in the form of subconscious psychological impressions. Most Indian philosophies, including Advaita, theorize that *saṁskāra*s constitute part of the mechanics of memory. *Saṁskāra*s provide the bridges or connecting triggers that bring past experiences into present memory. All memories are dependent upon *saṁskāra*s and maintained by such dispositions. We may not be able to directly perceive our memory *saṁskāra*s because they are subconscious but we infer them. When I perceive certain objects that draw emotions, desire, or prompt actions in me I can postulate some *saṁskāra* that links the object with prior events and experiences. A *saṁskāra* triggers memory when some perceived content combines with or triggers the

[622] BUbh 2.3.6. Madhavananda 1993, p. 236.
[623] BUbh 2.3.6. Madhavananda 1993, p. 238.

saṁskāra to produce its respective kind of awareness.[624] *Śaṁskāra*s are also memories that serve as latent impressions of knowledge that facilitate the intermediate operation of reminding one of invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*) in the process of inferential knowledge.[625]

In a closely related context, there is also an affective side to the concept. Dispositions somehow trigger affective states and desires in the mind to seek certain outcomes. For example, eating sweets everyday produces physical and psychological *saṁskāra*s, which subsequently manifest as physical and emotional craving for eating sweets. The *saṁskāra*s then further influence a person to continue performing such actions, whether physical, oral, or mental. One's actions determine the types of *vāsanā*s one accrues. Saintly or meritorious actions breed *vāsanā*s that lead the individual to more meritorious actions, pleasant experiences and helpful *vāsanā*s. Negative or harmful actions lead to painful *vāsanā*s, actions, and experiences.[626] These actions, when repeated, further strengthen the *saṁskāra*s or create new ones. The process is a cyclical one that fuels itself and deepens the *saṁskāra*s through habitual conditioning. *Saṁskāra*s as dispositions occur in the present, but are caused by past actions. Present events are triggers for the *saṁskāra*s, which lie right below the conscious surface in the mind. When triggered, *saṁskāra*s in turn awaken unresolved issues that manifest as fear, anxiety, desire, aversion, etc. For example, a small event may trigger great anger that

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624 For example, in GKbh 3.5 Śaṅkara uses *saṁskāra*s as the causes of memory, though this in the context of Vaiśeṣika philosophy.
625 VP Ch. 1, (Madhavananda 1963, p. 69).
626 Potter 1981, p .23.

possesses a person's psyche. The situation itself may not be sufficient for such a reaction, but the *saṁskāra* links the mind to deeper traumas in the past.

One can intentionally manipulate or reverse the cyclical self-propelling cycle of *saṁskāra* and action. Intentionally changing ones actions and thoughts in positive ways creates positive *saṁskāra*s. By creating new *saṁskāra*s one can ingrain new habits and actions and negate or disassociate from old *saṁskāra*s and their corresponding emotions and actions. A simple analogy for this process is the attempt to flatten a rolled up piece of paper. The paper carries a *saṁskāra* to repeatedly curl back up despite unrolling it and placing it flat. In order to counter that *saṁskāra* one can roll the paper in the opposite direction so that the paper gains a new *saṁskāra* to roll in the opposite direction. These *saṁskāra*s neutralize each other and the paper then remains flat.

This type of deconditioning and reconditioning forms an essential part of yogic practice in Advaita as in all askesis. The general task of the spiritual aspirant is to avoid forming harmful *saṁskāra*s, neutralize problematic ones, and to cultivate and reinforce positive ones. This general orientation falls within the domain of gaining mental purity and the requisite qualifications for self-knowledge. Practices used to cultivate the proper qualifications for *brahmavidyā* such as *karma yoga*, non-injury, compassion, and meditation generate corresponding dispositions that result in mental purification, negate engrained habits detrimental to self-inquiry, and facilitate internal emotional space to allow the *śabda pramāṇa* to function. However, I would theorize that we may also view *nididhyāsana* as a special means of *antaḥkarana śuddhi*, but unlike the four-fold means for purification, *nididhyāsana* targets a unique class or subset of *saṁskāra*s, which

disturb propositional knowledge of non-duality by creating new *saṁskāra*s or enlivening old *saṁskāra*s. *Nididhyāsana* is fundamentally different from methods for mental purity in that it uses knowledge gained from the Upanisads as the means to neutralize such *saṁskāra*s which are immune to listening and logical reflection. Such Advaita specific *saṁskāra*s only respond to practices that make use of self-knowledge, not any other practice such as meditation.

False notions that exist prior to the rise of *brahmvidyā* lead to a sense of insecurity and breed emotional states such as greed, hatred, anger, anxiety, and fear, which in turn impel one into various actions. These actions and the emotions surrounding them create and further ingrain *saṁskāra*s that produce memories and link the individual's mind back to those emotions and erroneous ideas. These *saṁskāra*s continue to exist antecedent to proper knowledge from *śravaṇa* and *manana*. Even though that self-knowledge has firm conviction and cannot be dislodged by doubt, the *saṁskāra*s continue to simulate previous false notions and create corresponding emotions. The *samskāra*s are dependent on ignorance but not ignorance itself. They are memories that can cause temporary confusion or psychological states that are not in keeping with one's understanding of self and reality as non-dual brahman. The problem with these *saṁskāra*s, from the standpoint of self-knowledge, is their reinforcement of notions of duality, a phenomenon Advaitins specify as contradictory habitual thinking patterns (*viparītabhāvanā). Viparītabhāvanā* or *viparītapratyaya* (contradictory thought) are specific terms used after introducing Vedānta and signify a situation where one's

experience and disposition is opposed to what one knows as his or her true identity.[627] *Viparītabhāvanā*s are the underlying *saṁskāra* that 'I am the body and mind" (*dehādi abhimāna* or *dehātmabuddhi bhāvanā*). These mental impressions regarding one's finite nature bubble up into one's mind despite one's conviction of the infinite nature of *brahman*.[628] They are Advaita specific *bhāvanā*s that reaffirm one's previous tendency to view the self as an individual finite entity. They may temporarily knock the individual off balance and disrupt his understanding and prevent liberating *brahmavidyā*. He may then mistakenly take the previous false notion as real again. Śaṅkara gives the example of a lost person who learns the proper direction but subsequently becomes confused about the direction again.[629] For example, in his commentary on BU 1.4.10 Śaṅkara writes:

> Sometimes, however, memories due to the impressions of false notions antecedent to the dawning of knowledge, simulating those notions, suddenly appear and throw him into the error of regarding them as actual false notions; as one who is familiar with the points of the compass sometimes all of a sudden gets confused about them.[630]

In his commentary on BG 4.18 Śaṅkara writes,

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[627] BUbh 1.4.10.

[628] *Kaṣāya* is a specific type of negative *saṁskāra* that creates mental affliction. *Kaṣāya*s are attested in GK 3.44 where Gaudapāda says one should know (the mind) with *kaṣāya*s (*sakaṣāyaṁ vijānīyāt*). Śaṅkara writes, "When the mind of a man, who is practicing again and again, is awakened from deep sleep and is withdrawn from objects, but is not established in equipoise and continues in an intermediate state, then *vijānīyāt*, one should know; that mind to be *sakaṣayam*, tinged with desire, in a state of latency" (Gambhirananda 1992, p. 317). *Kaṣāya* also occurs in CU 7.26.2, where Śaṅkara defines them as impurities such as *rāga* and *dveśa*, which are like tree sap that must be washed off by the repetition of knowledge and detachment.

These *kaṣāya*s arise during meditative absorption. They may be akin to problematic psychological tendencies that surface from the unconscious according to some depth psychologists. Also see their mention in GKbh 4.90, which defines *kaśaya* as attraction, repulsion, or delusion. The term *kaṣāya* generally refers to negative impressions, whereas *saṁskāra*s and *vāsanā*s represent both positive and negative impressions.

[629] This may be an indirect reference to CU 6.14 where a blindfolded man needs directions to find his way back to the land of Gandhāra.

> As such, although this answer has been given more than once, still a man becomes repeatedly deluded under the influence of a totally opposite perception. And forgetting the truth that has been heard again and again, he repeatedly raises false issues and questions![631]

The metaphysical relationship between *viparītabhāvanā* and *avidyā* and their relationship with regard to an individual are not clear. Is this type of *saṁskāra* a part of *avidyā*, identical with it, or an unrelated entity? Śaṅkara does not precisely define either *avidyā* or *saṁskāra*.[632] Both *saṁskāra*s and *avidyā* positively exist and veil knowledge, though in two entirely different ways. However, it appears to make more sense to separate *saṁskāra*s and *avidyā*. *Saṁskāra*s are fundamentally different because they are products of action and indirectly tied to ignorance. Ignorance leads to one's false notion of limited self, leading to insecurity and desire, which then lead to action. The actions then leave *saṁskāra*s. *Saṁskāra*s are secondary products whereas *avidyā* is beginningless and indeterminable.[633] In addition, it is questionable whether *avidyā* even exists at the time of *nididhyāsana* if one has already understood the meaning of the *mahāvākya* and

630 Madhvananda 1993, p. 116.

631 Gambhirananda 1995, p. 193.

In BS 3.4.47 we also find the *sūtra*, "On account of continued overpowering force of vision of difference we have injunction for sagehood (*nididhyāsana*).

632 Śaṅkara himself was reluctant to define the ontological reality of *avidyā* or its precise location. For example, when one questions for whom *avidyā* belongs to, Śaṅkara dismisses the question by saying it belongs to the one who asks. See BSbh 4.1.3, BGbh 13.2 and US 2.2.62-65.

Advaitins generally conceive of *avidyā* as indeterminable, but a variety of post-Śaṅkara Advaitins disagreed over the nature of *avidyā*. The locus of *avidyā*, whether within the individual or within *brahman*, would become a major point of contention among post-Śaṅkara Advaitins.

633 However, in some places Śaṅkara is ambiguous about this issue and appears to identify *saṁskāra*s and ignorance. He uses the term *avidyā leśa* (trace of ignorance) synonymously with *saṁskāra*s. In BU 1.4.7 (See Potter 1981, p. 189) he says false notions are memories due to impressions.

gained *brahmavidyā*. This last point is debatable and perhaps controversial because we have not been able to specify what kind of knowledge, propositional or non-propositional *brahmavidyā*, is present in *nididhyāsana*; however, perhaps at this point, when one continues to practice *nididhyāsana* in order to gain *niṣṭha*, then *avidyā* does not cover one's self anymore and *brahmavidyā* has already arisen. At that point only *saṁskāra*s, the shadow of ignorance, tenuously veil the full manifestation of *brahmavidyā* in the mind of the wise person.

Śaṅkara explains that, "even when knowledge emerges from *śravaṇa*, etc., it arises only after the impediments wear away."[634] *Nididhyāsana* cultivates clarity of self-knowledge by removing *saṁskāra*s and/or neutralizing their virulence so that self-knowledge is not subject to disruption. Dispositions will not interfere with an individual's steadfastness in self-knowledge when the dispositions' tendency to reinforce notions of duality is disempowered. In this way *nididhyāsana* brings self-knowledge alive without any obstruction or obstacles. *Saṁskāra*s are endless in number, just as *karma* is endless. It is not that the Advaitin must eliminate all *saṁskāra*s for this is an impossibility if they are endless. Furthermore, the *jīvanmukti* would not be capable of talking, memory, and other action without any *saṁskāra*s. The Advaitin only needs to deal with those that are specifically disrupting self-knowledge, and only so far as to let knowledge rise or to allow knowledge to remain steady. After there is total clarity of *brahmavidyā* one may

634 *śravaṇādidvāreṇāpi vidyotpadyamānā pratibandhakṣayāpekṣayaivotpadyate* | BSbh 3.4.51 (my translation).

naturally continue to handle other *saṁskāra*s, but this is not necessary at that point for gaining steadfastness (*niṣṭha*).

How exactly *nididhyāsana* neutralizes *saṁskāra*s is not clear. It is possible to look at *nididhyāsana* as instilling a new *saṁskāra* of non-duality that counters or supercedes *saṁskāra's* of duality (a position held by Maṇḍana Miśra and similar to Patañjali). It is the impressions arising from right knowledge and contemplation that suppress disturbing *saṁskāra*s and maintain one's non-dual identity in the midst of such situations. Another possibility is that contemplation neutralizes *saṁskāra*s without creating any new *saṁskāra*s. I believe the positive creation of a new *saṁskāra* in the former view is not as coherent as the latter in Śaṅkara's theory of knowledge because it may emphasize the necessity for a new experience. It also may leave *nididhyāsana* open to the critique that it is an action. *Saṁskāra*s are products of action and experience, so if *nididhyāsana* creates a new *saṁskāra*, one may argue that *nididhyāsana* is also an action. This is not necessarily a problem though, because it is important to understand that even if *nididhyāsana* produces a new *saṁskāra*, this *saṁskāra* does not negate ignorance but neutralizes other *saṁskāra*s. In at least one passage Śaṅkara does support the creation of a new *saṁskāra* through contemplation. For example, in BG 8.10 he writes "Imbued with that (strength) also, consisting in steadfastness of the mind arising from accumulation of *saṁskāra*s resulting from *samādhi* (*nididhyāsana*)."[635] However, this quote comes in the particular context of reaching the highest *puruṣa* at the time of death.

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635 *yogabalam tena samādhijasaṃskārapracayajanitacittasthairyalakṣaṇam yogabalam tena ca yuktaḥ* | (my translation).

The context of death and the function of dispositions and contemplation with regard to death bring us to a curious twist regarding *vāsanā*s.

Advaita, as well as Nyāya and other Indian philosophies, single out *vāsanā*s to explain the projection of the dream world during sleep. In the dream there is an as though temporary death because the organs of action cease functioning and there is no means to see anything. Only awareness remains present, as one's self-light. The dream objects, colors, and shapes are a manifestation of the mind that is conditioned by *vāsanā*s, which are aspects of the mind.[636] The *vāsanā*s become the objects in the dream. They create the dream body and the dream world, the duality of knower and known, and they are in turn illumined by pure awareness.

*Vāsanā*s also function in significant metaphysical ways beyond psychological descriptions of habits, memories, and dreams. These impressions, or residue of *karma*, help determine future actions or facilitate the manifestation of *karmic* potential and the corresponding experiences, not only in the present but in death and rebirth too. Just as in the dream, where the organs stop functioning and the *vāsanā*s determine the dream, so too in death the organs cease and the *vāsanā*s determine the trajectory of the subtle body, dictate the type of new body required in the next birth, and forge a link to that body.

BU 4.4.2 provides a description of what happens at death. The functions of the sense organs and the functions of the organs of actions withdraw into the subtle body of the individual. Thus when people see a person in the process of dying they notice that he or she loses the functions of the senses and action. According to the Upaniṣad, the sense

functions are united in the intellect. At death, the self (as the vital force) leaves the physical body through the top of the head or the eye or through some other body part. The vital force along with the merged functions then moves to another body. Knowledge, work, and past experience also goes along with the departing self.[637] *Vāsanā*s form an essential component of the transmigrating subtle body (*liṅga-śarīra*).[638] According to Śaṅkara, experiences are the impressions from the results of past action. These *vāsanā*s bring past actions into fruition and initiate new actions. Without them *karma* cannot fructify and new actions will not be done in the following birth.[639]

5.6.4: The Problem of *karma*, *vāsanās*, and *jīvanmukti*

The concepts of *vāsanā*s or *saṁskāra*s for a theory of transmigration of the subtle body present a difficult question: What is the relationship or identity of *saṁskāra*s in the context of *nididhyāsana* with *karma* leading to rebirth? Although *saṁskāra*s are ostensibly the impressions or shadow of previous *karma*, Śaṅkara does not clarify whether to or how to distinguish them from *karma*. This leads to the question of whether we should identify *karma* with contradictory dispositions (*viparītabhāvanā*s), the type of *saṁskāra*s we are concerned with in *nididhyāsana*. This question is especially relevant in the context of *jīvanmukti* (liberation while living). Śaṅkara himself uses *saṁskāra* as *viparītabhāvanā,* but also in terms of *karma* when discussing his theory of living while liberated (*jīvanmukti*). For example, he writes:

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636 BUbh 4.3.9, CUbh 8.5.4, PUbh 4.5, US 11.10.
637 BS 4.2.1-21 presents a similar but more detailed explanation of what happens at death.
638 In other contexts the *vāsanā*s composing the *liṅga śarīra* are *vāsanā*s from *avidyā*, *karma*, and *kama*. See MU 3.1.1 and PU 4.5.

> This false ignorance, even when sublated, continues for a while owing to past tendencies (*saṁskāra*s) like the continuance of the vision of two moons.[640]

> …the residue of *prarabdha* work is the cause of the persistence of the body after knowledge. [641]

> Even in the case of one in whom has arisen discriminating wisdom and who has renounced all actions, there can be, like staying in a house, the continuance in the body itself – the town with nine gates – as a consequence of the persistence of the remnants of the results of past actions which have started bearing fruit…[642]

These quotes all come in the context of Śaṅkara defending the doctrine of *jīvanmukti* (though the term *jīvanmukti* itself became popular for later Advaitins). Andrew Fort concisely defines *jīvanmukti* according to Śaṅkara:

> *Jīvanmukti* is knowing, while still in the body, that you are really the eternal nondual self (which is *brahman),* and knowing further that the self is never embodied, since the body (and all world appearance) is not ultimately real. Somewhat like a reflection in a mirror, the world appears and exists, but it is not finally real.[643]

In order to defend this doctrine, Śaṅkara takes recourse to CU 6.14.2,[644] which states, "I will remain here just as long as I am not released (*vimuc*), then I will attain (release)."[645]

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639 Madhavananda 1993, p. 491.

640 BS 4.1.15. *bādhitam api tu mithyājñānaṃ dvicandrajñānavat saṃskāravaśāt kaṇcitkālam anuvartata eva* / (my translation).
The continuing sight of two moons even when one knows there is only one moon results from some type of eye disease (*timira*).
In BGbh 18.48 Śaṅkara denies any trace of the two moons after ignorance is dispelled.

641 BU 1.4.10, Madhavananda 1993, p. 115.

642 BG 5.13, Gambhirananda 1995, p. 253 (*prārabdhaphalakarmasaṃskāraśeṣānuvṛttayā*)
Also see BUbh 4.4.21 and BUbh 1.4.7

643 Fort 1998, p. 5.

644 BSbh 4.1.15.

645 Fort 1998. p. 24. Olivelle translates this sentence as "There is delay for me here only until I am freed; but then I will arrive!" (Olivelle 1996, p. 155). Balasubramanian translates this sentences as, "For him there is delay only so long as he is not delivered (from the body), then he will become one with *brahman*." (Balasubramaniam, p. 121 of *Jivanmukti: A New Interpretation*). See Fort 1998, p. 25 for other important passages regarding *jīvanmukti*.

Śaṅkara interprets this passage as saying the body continues for some time even after *brahmavidyā*.

One of the basic challenges of explaining *jīvanmukti* is how to account for the continuation of the body after liberation. According to primary texts, liberation burns up all *karma*.[646] If *karma* fuels the continuation of life, then how can life continue after liberation? The body ought to immediately fall down because there is no more *karma* to impel it. The basic Advaita answer is found in Śaṅkara's distinction between actions that have already begun yielding results verses those that have not. Śaṅkara writes,

> After the acquisition of knowledge, those virtues and vices that have not begun to yield their fruits and that were accumulated in earlier lives or even in this life before the dawn of knowledge are alone destroyed, but not so are those destroyed whose results have already been partially enjoyed and by which has begun this present life in which the knowledge of *brahman* arises.[647]

According to Śaṅkara, self-knowledge only immediately exhausts previously accrued *karma* (*saṁcita karma*), and prevents the accumulation of further *karma* (*āgāmi karma*) because there is no more self-agency and no locus for *karma* in the liberated person who is free from action.[648] However, *prārabdha karma* is already set in motion and continues for some time just as an arrow released from the bow continues to its

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Vedāntins who support the immediate fall of the body in liberation (*sadyomukti*) cite MU 2.2.8, "When one sees him – both the high and the low; The knot of one's heart is cut, all doubts are dispelled; and his works come to an end" (Olivelle 1996, p. 273).

[646] BG 4.37, MU 2.2.8, CU 5.24.3, BU 4.4.23.

[647] BSbh 4.1.15.

[648] BSbh 4.1.19, BUbh 1.4.7, 1.4.10.

target, or the potter's wheel continues to spin even after the potter removes the pot from the wheel.[649]

Śaṅkara's effort to defend *jīvanmukti* raised a host of serious questions, which many post-Śaṅkara Advaitins, such as Citsukha, Sarvajñātman, Prakāśātman, Vimuktātman, and Madhusūdana Saraswati, analyzed in great theoretical detail, sometimes disagreeing amongst themselves. In the Advaita doctrine of *jīvanmukti*, the liberated person is free from self-ignorance and continues to live out his or her life. However, many classical Indian philosophers identify the body (and the pain it entails) with the existence of self-ignorance, for ignorance is the cause of becoming embodied. In this view one should become "bodiless" upon the destruction of self-ignorance. If the association of body and ignorance is correct, than ignorance must still remain for any living person and living while liberated is not possible. In response some Advaitins argued that the remaining *prārabdha karma* post-liberation is only a slight remnant of ignorance, but how can there be a remnant? Does that imply that one can partially know *brahman* and be partially ignorant? Furthermore, there are Upaniṣadic passages such as MU 2.2.8[650] that state all *karma* is destroyed at the time of knowledge according to Śaṅkara's interpretation. Many other questions remain, such as, how is ignorance working in liberation? Is only individual ignorance negated and not universal ignorance? Is only the concealing power of ignorance negated and not the projecting power? Is a

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[649] BSbh 3.32, 4.1.15, BU 1.4.7, 1.4.10, and CUbh 6.14.2. Śaṅkara may be drawing the analogy of the potter's wheel from *Sāṅkhya Kārika* 67.

[650] When one sees him – both the high and the low; The knot of one's heart is cut, all doubts are dispelled; and his works come to an end (Olivelle 1996, p. 273).

jīvanmukta required to live an ethical life if he or she cannot accrue bad *karma*? Is he or she outside of all societal and ethical norms and able to follow antinomian social practices without any *karmic* repercussions? How long does it take for the body to fall after liberation? Does the body fall immediately or after some time?

Though no clear resolutions to these questions are forthcoming, I think the simplest and safest position the Advaitin may offer is to sever the association of *prārabdha karma* and ignorance. *Karma* and ignorance do not have a direct relationship. Their relationship is mediated by the individual's agency and false sense of self. Knowledge directly negates ignorance but not *karma*.[651] *Brahmavidyā* removes the false sense of self, and secondarily results in the dispersion of currently accruing and previously accrued *karma* (*āgāmi* and *saṁcita karma*) that has not yet begun. But *brahmavidyā* need not destroy *prārabdha karma* because it is already manifesting and does not depend on the individual's sense of agency anymore.[652] From this perspective there is no contradiction between holding knowledge of non-duality while living embodied as a finite individual. However, some Advaitins, such as Citsukha, Prakāśātman, and Madhusūdana Saraswati, associated the remaining *prārabdha karma* as a trace of ignorance (*avidyāleśa*) due to Śaṅkara's acceptance of the sight of two moons remaining after knowledge of one moon in BSbh 4.1.15. If identifying *prārabdha karma* as a form of ignorance is too problematic (because it conflates two different species, ignorance and *karma*, which are not identical nor mutually exclusive), then one could

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[651] BUbh 3.3.1.

[652] CUbh 6.14.2, BSbh 4.1.15, 4.1.19, BUbh 1.4.7, 1.4.10.

identify *avidyāleśa* with *saṁskāra*s, where *saṁskāra*s are impressions of ignorance, but not ignorance itself. This response avoids the argument over ignorance but results in the identification of the *jīvanmukta*'s *prārabdha* with *saṁskāra*s, which is admittedly perhaps still a tenuous position to hold.[653]

The problem is that Śaṅkara does not make a clear distinction between *saṁskāra*s that cause the continuation of the body post-liberation from the *saṁskāra*s that *nididhyāsana* neutralizes. *Prārabdha karma* does not pose a problem for the *jīvanmukti* for he or she is "bodiless" even while embodied, meaning he or she understands the apparent and dependent nature of the body and the world even while continuing in the body and worldly activity.[654] In this case *brahmavidyā* overrides the appearance of the world, just as the perception of the sun arising at dawn does not confuse the physicist who knows that the sun revolves around the earth. Advaitins generally assume there is total stability (*niṣṭha*) and clarity in knowledge at the point of *jīvanmukti*, and would deny that the *jīvanmukta* with immediate *brahmavidyā* is still subject to contradictory dispositions (*viparītabhāvanā*s) that could override his self-knowledge through some type of disturbance or confusion. If we identify the remaining *prārabdha* of the *jīvanmukta* with *saṁskāra*s, then we should not view *saṁskāra*s as obstacles or as contradictory dispositions. In fact, from this position one could even argue that Śaṅkara's discussions of *saṁskāra*s have little to do with *nididhyāsana* or the practical difficulties that Advaitins face, and are in fact only a theoretical doctrine to defend

[653] Post-Śaṅkara Advaitins argued over these issues in great detail and with many nuanced positions. For an overview, see Fort 1998, Chapter 4.

jīvanmukti. But this is not always the case for Śaṅkara does not make a distinction between *saṁskāra*s as *viparītabhāvanā*s and *samskāra*s as the *jīvanmukta*'s remaining *karma*. Perhaps the most telling example of this non-distinction occurs in BU 1.4.7 where he writes:

> …but still, because there are inevitably the results of karma, which cause the production of the body, even when there is the gain of right knowledge, there is also necessarily the future activity of body, mind, and speech because of the strength of *karma*, whose course has been undertaken like the continuation of an arrow after it has been released. The cognition of knowledge, being weaker than (*karma*), is posited as an alternative. Therefore the continuous memory of self-knowledge, dependent on the strength of practices like renunciation, dispassion, etc, must be restricted.[655]

In this quote Śaṅkara refers to the continuation of the body due to the strength of *karma*, a clear reference to *jīvanmukti*. But he also alludes to the fact that *karma* overrides textual knowledge in the sense of the difficulty of dealing with habitual thought patterns that disrupt knowledge and/or as a way of explaining why the body continues to exist for one who has knowledge. He then recommends the continuous memory of self-knowledge (*smṛti santati*), a reference to *nididhyāsana*, to counter the force of such *karma*. It appears here that he identifies *viparītabhāvanā*s as the *prārabdha karma* for a *jīvanmukti* yet he still emphasizes the necessity for *nididhyāsana*.[656] The difficulty in this position is explaining how *nididhyāsana* can have any effect on *prārabdha karma*. If

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[654] BSbh 4.1.15 and BSbh 1.1.4.

[655] *yadyapy evam śarīrārambhakasya karmaṇo niyataphalatvāt samyagjñānaprāptāv api avaśyaṃ bhāvinī pravṛttir vaṅmanaḥkāyānām, labdhavṛtteḥ karmaṇo balīyastvāt mukteṣvādi pravṛttivat; tena pakṣe prāptaṃ jñānapravṛttidourbalyam* |
tasmāt tyāgavairāgyādisādhanabalāvalambena ātmavijñānasmṛtisaṃtatir niyantavyā bhavati | BUbh 1.4.7 (my translation).

[656] A similar situation, where the two ideas come together occurs in BUbh 1.4.10, BSbh 3.4.51, BSbh 4.1.15, and CUbh 3.14.4.

prārabdha karma continues despite *brahmavidyā*, then why would continuing *nididhyāsana* have any effect on *prārabdha*?[657] This potential problem raises the possibility that Śaṅkara conflates the two types or two powers of *saṁskāra*s, as *prārabdha karma* or as habitual psychological tendencies. Śaṅkara did not make a clear distinction between *karma* and *saṁskāra*s and perhaps thus struggled to make room for *saṁskāra*s in his soteriology. Even through from a broad standpoint we may include thoughts and emotions, particularly their manifestation as *viparītabhāvanā*s, in the larger universal of *prārabdha karma* that makes up all occurrences in one's life, *viparītabhāvanā*s are more accurately understood as the effects of *prārabdha karma* or the effects of the impressions of *prārabdha karma* accumulated throughout life.

The above quote from BUbh 1.4.1 connects with one of the primary problems in determining the chronological place of *nididhyāsana*. Is *nididhyāsana* a means to *brahmavidyā* or something used to stabilize self-knowledge after *brahmavidyā*? In the BUbh 1.4.7 passage it looks as though *nididhyāsana* is for stabilizing one's knowledge after proper self-knowledge (*samyagjñāna*). In this case I do not see how it could have any effect on already begun (*prārabdha*) *karma* or effect the continuation or non-continuation of the body after knowledge. The body and worldly duality exist regardless of the neutralization of *saṁskāra*s. This is one reason why in this context I prefer to interpret the terms *viparītabhāvanā* or *saṁskāra* as psychological dispositions rather than as *karma*. *Brahmavidyā* and *prārabdha karma* are not mutually contradictory, which is precisely why *jīvanmukti* is possible. Otherwise one would drop dead simultaneously

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[657] A similar critique can be aimed at Maṇḍana's *prasaṅkhyāna* contemplation.

with *brahmavidyā* or one would have to wait till death for *brahmavidyā* to come, at which point there would be no functioning mind remaining to gain *brahmavidyā*.

5.6.5: *Jñāna-niṣṭhā*: Stabilizing Knowledge

The Advaitin's self-identity as *brahman* is ideally free of doubt and available at all times and in all situations. This individual remains free from sadness and insecurity, is not pulled by desires and aversions, and is unattached to action and the results of action. Śaṅkara refers to this clarity as *jñāna-niṣṭhā* or *brahmaniṣṭhā*, compounds that translate as "steadfastness in knowledge" or "grounded in *brahman*."[658] "Grounded in *brahman*" is of course metaphorical, indicating that one with *niṣṭhā* is grounded and completely secure in knowledge of *brahman*. He or she knows "I am *brahman*" without doubts or error in an immediate fashion.[659] The following section explores how Śaṅkara interprets steadfastness in knowledge and understands its relationship to *nididhyāsana*.

Śaṅkara adopts the term *niṣṭhā* from different passages in the primary texts. It occurs most often in the *Bhagavadgītā* where it has various meanings such as a state, lifestyle, path, devotion, commitment, certainty, or steadfastness. In some verses of the BG *niṣṭhā* appears to be a practice, means and/or a corresponding lifestyle in general. For example, in BG 3.2 Arjuna questions which means, action or knowledge, will lead him to the ultimate good. *Kṛṣṇa* responds in BG 3.3 that in the beginning he told of two types of commitments (*niṣṭhā*), *karma yoga* for the *yogin*s and *jñāna yoga* for the

[658] Or to the person, a *brahmaniṣṭaḥ*.
[659] Some other similar phrases coming from the root *sthā* (to stand, to stay) relating to either knowledge or *brahman* are also used. See *brahma samstha* in BS 3.4.20, 5.5.17, 5.19-20, *brāhmisthiti* in BG 2.72, *prajñā pratiṣthitā* in BG 2.68, and *sthitaprajña* in BG 2.72.

renunciates (*sāṅkhyas*).[660] For Śaṅkara, both commitments ultimately have the pursuit of self-knowledge in common, but the first makes use of action (*pravṛtti*) to purify oneself for knowledge while the second forgoes action (*nivṛtti*) and focuses solely on knowledge. The choice in BG 3.3 is not exactly between action and knowledge but between *karma yoga* for the householder and renunciation for the ascetic. In this context, *niṣṭhā* is a means leading to liberation as its end. It refers to the general meaning of a commitment or path leading to liberation, which includes both practice and a type of lifestyle either as householder or renunciate.

Śaṅkara specifically associates *niṣṭhā* with the lifestyle of renunciation because the *saṁnyāsin* is completely dedicated to knowledge of *brahman*.[661] Śaṅkara accepts *saṁnyāsa* as appropriate for both the one seeking liberation as well as the one who is already liberated.[662] Later Advaita texts, such as the *Jīvanmuktiviveka*, designate the former type of *saṁnyāsa* as *vividiṣā-saṁnyāsa* and the latter as *vidvat-saṁnyāsa*.[663] Both types of *saṁnyāsin*s ideally live a quiet secluded and contemplative life, without relationships or social, familial and ritual obligations, and they are dedicated to gaining liberation. The *vividiṣā-saṁnyāsin*, one who desires to know *brahman*, has not yet gained self-knowledge but takes to a life of renunciation because he lacks any inclination for worldly pursuits and believes there is nothing left to gain in the conventional world of means and ends. This person is a *jñānaniṣṭha* in the sense that he or she is pursuing self-

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660 *Niṣṭhā* equals persistence in what is undertaken (*sthitih anustheyatātparyaṃ)*

661 BGbh 3.17, 18.3 18.12, 18.55, and MUbh 3.2.6.

662 BUbh 4.5.15 and BUbh 4.4.22. See Olivelle 1993, p. 226.

663 *Jīvanmuktiviveka* 1-4.

knowledge to the exclusion of all other pursuits and is thus defined by the means pursued. In context of BG 3.2-3 *niṣṭhā* is ostensibly the yoga of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*), the means appropriate for the *vividiṣā-saṁnyāsin*, which includes *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* (or *jñāna yoga* may be specifically synonymous with *nididhyāsana).* For example, in Śaṅkara's introduction to the *Bhagavadgītā*, he writes, "That (liberation) results from *dharma*, in the form of abidance in self-knowledge preceded by renunciation of all action."[664] Terms such as *ananyayoga*, *yukta cetas* , and *smṛti-santati*, used for *nididhyāsana* and *jñānayoga* may also be synonymous with *niṣṭhā* in Śaṅkara's opinion. In such contexts *niṣṭhā* indicates an absolute commitment to self-knowledge in the form of the repetition of contemplation and the continuous flow of memory.

The *vidvat-saṁnyāsin* is a renunciate who can discriminate between self and non-self and possesses knowledge of identity with *brahman*. Any sense of agency or attachment to action necessarily falls away in this *brahmavidyā* and he or she automatically leads a life of renunciation.[665] It is important to note that Śaṅkara's correlation of renunciation of action and *niṣṭhā* is not only referring to the *saṁnyāsa* stage of life (*āśrama*) as the formal renunciation of ritual and *āśrama* duties. Freedom of action is not avoiding action but recognizing that the self is actionless.[666] One gives up all action only through self-knowledge. Action implies factors such as an agent, object, and means, but the *vidvān* sees these as *mithyā* and only leading to transient results. From this perspective, *saṁnyāsa* is an end in itself. Most Advaitins understand the *vidvān* as

[664] *tat ca sarvakarmasaṁnyāsapūrvkād ātmajñānaniṣṭhārūpād darmād bhavati* (my translation).
[665] BU 3.5.1.

possessing *jñāna-niṣṭhā* in the sense of total clarity and *brahmavidyā*. He is living while liberated and a *paramahaṁsa*.[667] When *niṣṭhā* describes the *vidvat saṁnyāsin* whose wisdom is established (*sthita-prajñā*), then *niṣṭhā* means liberation in a sense different than the path of knowledge for the *vividiṣā saṁnyāsin*.

In the cases of the *vividiṣā* and *vidvat saṁnyāsin, niṣṭhā* is either the means (for the *vividiṣā*) or a description of the end (for the *vidvān*). However, even though in some contexts *niṣṭhā* is the path, involving a process of contemplation, Śaṅkara in most usages identifies *niṣṭhā* with the culmination, perfection, and steadfastness of self-knowledge in the form of immediate knowledge of *brahman*. For example, in his commentary on BG 18.50 he writes, "*niṣṭhā* is the culmination or completion. Of what? That which is the highest culmination of the knowledge of brahman.[668] In MUbh 1.2.12 he uses the phrase *brahmaniṣṭha* to describe the proper teacher who is liberated. In his commentary Śaṅkara writes:

> One who, having given up all action, is steadfast in the non-dual *brahman* alone, is a *brahmaniṣṭhaḥ,* just as the one who is steadfast in *japa* (repeating a *mantra*), the one who is steadfast in *tapas* (austerity).[669]

In the context of the BG, *niṣṭhā* is often synonymous with the *sthita-prajña*, "one of firm wisdom" whose knowledge that "I am *brahman*" is established and clearly

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[666] BGbh 3.4.

[667] The *paramahaṁsa* is generally considered the highest class of the renouncer; however, it is not clear whether Śaṅkara endorsed the classic four-fold division of renouncers (Olivelle 1993, p. 229).

[668] *niṣṭhā paryavasānaṁ parisamāptiḥ ity etat | kasya? brahmajñānasya yā parā parisamāptiḥ* | BGbh 18.50 (my translation).
Also see BGbh 2.72 and 3.17.

[669] *hitvā sarvakarmāṇi kevale 'dvaye brahmaṇi niṣṭhā yasya so 'yaṁ brahmaniṣṭhaḥ japaniṣṭhaḥ taponiṣṭha iti yadvat* | MUbh 1.2.12 (my translation).

grasped.[670] Kṛṣṇa provides a thorough description of the *sthita-prajña* in chapter two of the *Bhagavadgītā* following Arjuna's query of how to describe him. Kṛṣṇa responds saying the *sthita-prajña* has given up all desires and is happy in his self by his self (2.54). He is not affected by sorrow or attached to pleasure and is free from desire, fear, and anger (2.56). He is unattached in every situation, neither rejoicing in nor rejecting the pleasant and the unpleasant (2.57). And he is able to withdraw his sense organs from their objects (2.58).[671]

A similar set of verses describing *niṣṭhā* occurs in BG 5.17-21: Those whose intellect is awake to that self-knowledge, whose self is that *ātman*, who are steadfast (*niṣṭhā*) in that *brahman* attain the state from which there is no return (5.17). They have a view of equality and see *brahman* in all things (5.18). Those abiding in *brahman* conquer the cycle of birth and death (5.19). The one who knows *brahman* and is established in *brahman* does not rejoice or become dejected in gaining what is desirable or undesirable (5.20). He who is not attached to external objects finds happiness in the self. He is deeply engaged in his knowledge of *brahman* and gains happiness that never wanes (5.21).[672] Śaṅkara also defines *niṣṭhā* as freedom from action (*naiṣkarmya*) and as the state of abiding in one's own self .[673]

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[670] BGbh 2.54-72. Śaṅkara identifies the *sthita-prajña* as having *niṣṭhā* in BGbh 2.72.
The *sthita-prajñā* is also identified as one who is established in wisdom (*prajñā-pratiṣṭhitā*) in BG 2.57, 2.58, 2.61, 2.68.

[671] Also see BG 2.68-72.

[672] Also see BG 4.18-23, 12.13-20, 14.22-26.

[673] BGbh 3.4

The terms *sthitaprajṅā* and *jñānaniṣṭhā*[674] support the importance of *nididhyāsana*. The Upaniṣads and Śaṅkara could use the term *ātma-jñāna* by itself because self-knowledge does not require any qualification. But the term *niṣṭhā* signifies that self-knowledge requires commitment and steadfastness in the Advaita view. This is similar to the distinction discussed earlier of *jñāna* and *vijñāna* which points to some kind of change or deepening of knowledge that is necessary when obstacles block verbal testimony. *Niṣṭhā* in this case ostensibly occurs through the gradual removal of *saṁskāra*s in the form of *viparītabhāvanā*s. When *viparītabhāvanā*s do not disturb one's knowledge, then he or she possesses *niṣṭhā* and naturally remains immersed in self-knowledge. In a few places Śaṅkara clearly recognizes a distinction between the rise of knowledge eventually leading to steadfastness in knowledge.[675] The use of *niṣṭhā* recognizes this reality and the great difficulty required to gain steadfast *brahmavidyā*.

If a phrase such as the continuous memory of self-knowledge (*pratyaya-saṃtāna*, or *smṛti-santati*), which sometimes denotes *nididhyāsana* also denotes *niṣṭhā* in some contexts, then this leads to a potential problem. *Niṣṭhā* is used for both *nididhyāsana* as well as the *brahmavidyā* gained through *nididhyāsana*. Sometimes it is not clear whether the text or Śaṅkara's interpretation refers to *nididhyāsana* or to complete steadfastness and whether it is sensible to make such a distinction. One question this raises if whether we should identify both types of *niṣṭhā* as *nididhyāsana*. In some cases it is possible to interpret the text either way. But if *niṣṭhā* is understood as clarity, then why would

[674] BG 18.55
[675] For example see BGbh 5.12 and 18.10.

Śaṅkara employ terms such as *smṛti-santana* or other such references to maintaining one's knowledge? One would assume that after the rise of knowledge, and certainly by the point of *niṣṭhā*, no more contemplative practice is necessary. In BGbh 18.55 Śaṅkara raises this very question in the voice of an opponent who asks:

> Whenever any knowledge of something arises in a knower, at that very moment the knower knows that object. Hence, he does not depend on steadfastness in knowledge which consists in the repetition of the act of knowing. And therefore, it is contradictory to say one knows not through knowledge, but through steadfastness in knowledge which is a repetition of the act of knowing.

Śaṅkara responds, saying:

> There is no such fault, since the culmination of knowledge – which (knowledge) is associated with the causes of its unfoldment and maturity, and which has nothing to contradict it – in the conviction that one's own self has been realized is what is referred to by the word *niṣṭhā*. When knowledge – which concerns the identity of the 'knower of the field' and the supreme self, and which remains associated with the renunciation of all actions that arise from the perception of the distinction among their accessories such as agent etc., and which unfolds from the instruction of the scriptures and teachers, depending on purity of the intellect etc. and humility etc. which are the auxiliary causes of the origin and maturity of knowledge – continues in the form of the conviction that one's own self has been realized, then that continuance is called the supreme steadfastness in knowledge.[676]

Sankara, as the voice of the opponent, first defines *niṣṭhā* as the repetition of knowledge, which sounds like a definition of *nididhyāsana*. But Śaṅkara then redefines it not as a means but as the culmination of knowledge. *Nididhyāsana* as a commitment to *jñāna-yoga* requires some intention and effort to direct the mind to the self. It is the means that provides one with the ability to remain steadfast in knowledge, at which point it becomes superfluous. The continuous memory of self-knowledge (*smṛti-satati*)

[676] Gambhirananda 1995, p. 729-30.

naturally continues in *niṣṭhā* without any obstruction from *saṁskāra*s. Implicit to this discussion is Śaṅkara's recognition of a potential confusion between identifying *niṣṭhā* as *nididhyāsana* or as final clarity, as well as potential contradictions if he insists on repetition after final *brahmavidyā.* One does not gain new knowledge in *niṣṭhā*, only maturity, and there is no more necessity of repetition and nothing remaining to do or recognize. However, terms such as *ananya bhakti* and *smṛti-santati* are still appropriate in this case because the liberated person's mind naturally comes back to his or her baseline identity as *brahman*. The *jīvanmukta* is by nature engaged in deep contemplation.[677] This stream of thoughts is a natural result of clarity, not a practice necessary to remove problematic *saṁskāras*, for at this point there are no more obstructions to self-knowledge.

[677] MUbh 3.2.5.

Conclusion

Throughout this study of *nididhyāsana* we have repeatedly encountered difficulty in explaining just how Śaṅkara's liberation takes place within the causal nexus of the world. The causal paradigm, one presumed in the broader epistemology developed in several schools of classical Indian philosophy, has it that liberation occurs as the effect of a set of entities and causal factors. But the causal view is not compatible with Śaṅkara's epistemology of liberation for two interdependent reasons. First, Śaṅkara conceives of the *ātman* as self-illuminating awareness and self-evident existence. Awareness is supposed to be intrinsically reflexive and does not require a second or higher-order cognition to reveal it. As pure awareness, the *ātman* is the very presupposition of all experience and knowledge, and the locus of reflexive awareness. The *ātman* is already present as the very substratum and the primitive presence of one's own being and sense of self. Self-illuminating awareness exists independently of any causal process and can never become an object of knowledge within a causal epistemology. In the final analysis of Advaita's metaphysics of non-duality, that same awareness is immanent and transcendent to both causes and their effects. It is limitless by nature, unchanging, and free from any relations, attributes, or predication.

Śaṅkara's conception of awareness leads to a second reason Advaita's "liberation" is not compatible with a causal epistemology. The soteriological goal of the Advaitin, freedom from *saṁsāra* and suffering, is attained through *brahmavidyā*, the

direct recognition of oneself as non-dual *brahman*. However, in Śaṅkara's conception of liberation, the object of knowledge, the knowledge itself, and the knower are all supposed to be the one *ātman*. Śaṅkara equates liberation to the self, so by extension liberation is also already present and eternally self-existent. Just as self-illuminating awareness is not a result to be accomplished, so too is self-knowledge not to be accomplished. This leads to the position that *mokṣa,* in the form of *brahmavidyā*, is independent of any world-based causal processes. From this ultimate metaphysical standpoint Śaṅkara can claim that in reality there is no fundamental problem, no suffering, and no *saṁsāra*. Everyone is already liberated because the *ātman* is free from all duality and limitations.

While Śaṅkara agrees that there is no problem in reality, he accepts the common view that we do not know or experience ourselves as liberated. Śaṅkara thus holds a seemingly paradoxical position that the individual is liberated yet ignorant of this fact, and thus requires *brahmavidyā* as a solution for a problem that is not real. The Advaita seeker has to accomplish what is already accomplished. From the standpoint of the seeker, Śaṅkara does employ an epistemology leading to *brahmavidyā*, but does so with sophisticated thinking and a number of subtle manipulations not to contradict his doctrine of non-duality or to place liberation in a causal process. He accomplishes this in a number of ways, but in this study I have singled out three of them repeatedly: (1) Śaṅkara separates the fields of knowledge and action. (2) He identifies the Upaniṣads as a unique source of knowledge that when studied under a suitable teacher will convey direct liberating *brahmavidyā*. And (3) he reframes the nature of ignorance as something positively existing, which leads to the view that *mokṣa* is the removal of ignorance and

various obstacles to *brahmavidyā*. These three points shape his interpretation of *nididhyāsana*. Let me summarize each one and describe how it leads him to a particular conception of contemplation.

A presupposition of Śaṅkara's Advaita, following the Pūrvamīmāṁsakās, is that action and self-knowledge operate in mutually distinct domains. In some ways this is not entirely true, for surely cognition guides voluntary action in the Advaita view, and *brahmavidyā* will cause changes in the liberated person's mind and self-identity. However, Śaṅkara's essential point is that self-knowledge and action are autonomous and do not have an effect on each other's content. Cognition is not identical to action, does not directly produce action, and cannot destroy the results of action. Action cannot produce knowledge or destroy ignorance (*avidyā*). Therefore one should not pursue *brahmavidvyā* through action for actions cannot produce self-knowledge. Furthermore, the eternal and uncaused nature of liberation removes it from the domain of action, which can only take place in time and result in time-limited effects. If the self is non-dual, self-existent, and self-illuminated, then there is no need to gain, produce, purify, or modify oneself because one already is what he or she seeks to be. However, even though critical of the soteriological value of action, Śaṅkara does not completely discount action. A variety of actions are necessary to align a source of knowledge so that it can properly function. But he distinguishes such actions from knowing itself. The student must fulfill a number of prerequisites to gain the adequate eligibility for *brahmavidyā*. Cultivating prerequisites such as a concentrated and penetrating mind that is not swayed by emotions

and is receptive to Advaita wisdom is only accomplished through practices such as meditation and *karma yoga* among others.

Śaṅkara's critical separation of action and self-knowledge narrows our understanding of his view of *nididhyāsana*. Śaṅkara considers *nididhyāsana* as part of the knowing process for *brahmavidyā*, and therefore also excludes *nididhyāsana* from the domain of action. He believes *nididhyāsana* is distinctly separate from mental actions such as meditation, visualization, devotion, worship, and prayer. *Nididhyāsana* does share some similar qualities to meditation practices that seek to control or extinguish thoughts in one's mind. Both require a clear collected mind able to repeat and maintain a single thought to exclusion of all others. However, Śaṅkara expains that *nididhyāsana* is fundamentally different from meditation. Meditation, like all actions, is person-dependent (*puruṣatantra*). Its content is subject to a person's will and does not necessarily correspond to an object of knowledge. Meditation is not an independent *pramāṇa* nor dependent on a *pramāṇa*, and thus cannot function as a source of *brahmavidyā* in Śaṅkara's opinion. *Nididhyāsana*, in contrast, is object-dependent (*vastu tantra*). It is defined by its knowledge content, which must match its object.

Śaṅkara's *nididhyāsana* is separate from actions such as meditation, but Śaṅkara does not believe it removes self-ignorance independent of the teaching of the Upaniṣads. One of the defining doctrines of Śaṅkara is his claim that only verbal testimony, in the form of the words of the Upaniṣads, is the *pramāṇa* for *brahmavidyā*. For Śaṅkara, the Upaniṣads both point to the existence of *brahman* and directly convey that knowledge through methods intrinsic to their language. According to Śaṅkara, the Upaniṣadic

sentences can provide immediate and non-propositional *brahmavidyā* because the self is an immediate self-reflexive entity. Otherwise, if the self was an indirect distant object, then one could only gain propositional knowledge of it by description. However, understanding the Upaniṣadic texts is exceedingly difficult due to their unique content and enigmatic style. The teacher requires specific verbal methods to unlock the meaning of the Upaniṣads, and the student must cultivate a receptivity and ability to encounter the texts successfully. As we have seen, Śaṅkara's primary technique to grasp the Upaniṣadic sentence meanings is a sophisticated form of secondary indication (*jahadajallakṣaṇā*), a type of metaphor, which simultaneously retains and rejects a literal and conventional sense. Śaṅkara also describes this technique as continuity (*anvaya*) and discontinuity (*vyatireka*), a form of Upaniṣadic reasoning that determines the relationship of what persists and what does not persist between two things and determines if one is independent of the other. The great sentences (*mahāvākya*) such as "You are that" (*tat tvam asi*) or "I am *brahman*" (*aham brahmāsmi*) instigate this process of what I have called indication through negation in order to solve their incongruous equation of individual and world. The Upaniṣads do not directly designate and objectify *brahman*, but indirectly point the student to *brahman*. Through this method the student distinguishes the self, the continuous presence of non-dual existence and awareness, from the not-self, consisting of impermanent and adventitious elements, properties, forms, and identities.

We can understand *nididhyāsana* properly only after understanding the way in which Śaṅkara conceptualizes the Upaniṣads as a *pramāṇa* for *brahmavidyā*.

Contemplation becomes possible after listening to the Upaniṣads because only then can the contemplator understand how to see beyond the direct meanings of the words to the implied ones that point to the self. The sentence meaning, which provides the content of *nididhyāsana*, brings the contemplator back to his or her self by uncovering the non-dual nature of *ātman* through secondary indication. Indication through *anvaya* and *vyatireka* constitutes the method and contemplative grammar that enables one to contemplate the sentence meanings. *Anvaya/vyatireka* is the basic and explicit premise behind *nididhyāsana* in Śaṅkara's understanding, evident in the discrimination of the perceiver and perceived along with the contemplative process of mentally dismissing adventitious properties such as name and form in order to arrive at the constant, continuous, and unchanging *ātman*. Thus Śaṅkara reasons that *nididhyāsana* cannot be separated from the Upaniṣadic teachings or possess any function independent of them.

Śaṅkara does not specify how contemplation is to be done as clearly as we would like. The method and result of his contemplation is somewhat mysterious and puzzling, but close readings of his commentaries allows us to reconstruct a basic outline. The contemplator "pulls his mind back" from the world, a contemplative process of letting go of all sense objects similar to the *Yogasūtra's pratyāhāra*. He then progressively mentally "withdraws" his mind, with all its components, into the self. The contemplation is intended to bring the contemplator to what is ultimately real by following a hierarchical distinction of sense objects, sense organs, mind, intellect, and *brahman* based on subtlety, causality, permanence, and pervasiveness. There appears to be a process of focusing on the higher object through understanding greater reality. This is a gradual process of

subsuming particulars into their higher sources. Seeing objects as non-separate from their ultimate substratum allows one to see through appearances and penetrate to their true reality as pure undifferentiated being. Here the Advaitin seems to reach universal being and makes a difficult transition to identifying this being with the *ātman*.

Contemplation negates any conceived self-identities by penetrating each level and ultimately reaching one's true self according to Śaṅkara. The process is both exclusive and inclusive. At each step there is a jump to a broader more universal source, which on the one hand negates the previous more particular one consisting of dependent effects, yet includes it within the larger "universal" which is its cause or substrate reality. In this manner all identities are excluded as the not self and simultaneously included as not separate from one's self, which is *brahman*, the absolute universal, according to Śaṅkara.

One may think about contemplation through various conceptual angles found in different Upaniṣadic teaching episodes. We may also categorize *nididhyāsana* from either an external or internal orientation, following Śaṅkara and his disciples. The former would look outwards and recognize all objects as one's self. The latter contemplation would look inwards and recognize everything outside within the self. Both lead to the infinite self, but the former moves through a contemplative analysis of name, form, and existence, and the latter through contemplating one's self as awareness. We may also divide *nididhyāsana* into contemplations that follows objects and those that follow words, as does Śaṅkara. In his view, all forms of *nididhyāsana* depend on the Upaniṣad sentence meanings, but contemplations following words do so in an explicit way where the contemplator repeats a *mahāvākya* while recognizing its meaning. These pithy sentences

encapsulate the teaching of non-duality and in contemplation they act as triggers to retrieve self-knowledge gained from *śravaṇa*. Śaṅkara tells us that the recognition of identity of self and *brahman* from the sentence meaning is repeated in *nididhyāsana*, creating a uniform and continuous cognition of non-duality, to the exclusion of all other thoughts. This is metaphorically described as "placing the mind on the *ātman*." It is supposed to culminate in the direct recognition of *brahman* and the knowledge that names and forms, i.e. anything we can objectify, are superficial and completely dependent on unqualified existence for their reality. This represents a radical shift in perspective. Seeing objects as non-separate from their ultimate substratum allows one to see through appearances of conventional realities and penetrate to their true absolute reality as pure undifferentiated being.

The theory of the positive existence of ignorance (*avidyā*) and obstacles is to account for the fact that the *ātman* is not properly recognized even though it is an accomplished reality, the ground of all experience, and the presupposition of every apprehension. Ignorance and obstacles to *brahmavidyā* veil the *ātman*'s nature as non-dual awareness. Śaṅkara's conception of *nididhyāsana* is in keeping with the theories of positive ignorance and self-illuminating awareness, in that contemplation functions only to remove obstructions to *brahmavidyā*. *Nididhyāsana* expands one's capability to understand the Upanisadic identity of self and *brahman*. Śaṅkara does not identify *brahmavidyā* as a new experience, and *nididhyāsana* by logical extension also does not produce anything new. It is not intended as a vehicle for transforming indirect theoretical verbal self-knowledge into direct experiential self-knowledge or as a means for

transcendent mystical experiences or altered states of non-dual consciousness, though he does not deny those states occur in a soteriological process. At the same time, Śaṅkara does accept a deepening maturity of self-knowledge that may require *nididhyāsana*. *Nididhyāsana* aims to deepen one's understanding of the Upaniṣads by neutralizing affective dispositions to think in a non-unitive fashion (*saṁskāra*s). *Saṁskāra*s are due to sense experiences presenting diversity and conditioned beliefs of oneself as finite, limited, and intrinsically separate from the surrounding world. *Nididhyāsana* is required to neutralize such dispositions in the case that they persist and disturb self-knowledge in spite of one having doubtless and full conviction cultivated through exhaustive *śravaṇa* and *manana*. It is this process of gaining clarity through contemplation that makes one's *brahmavidyā* free of obstacles, immediately available, and stable through life situations. I believe this distinction of knowledge with obstacles and stable knowledge without obstacles, a distinction that validates a process of study and knowledge that takes time, accurately describes Śaṅkara's position on the person liberated while living (*jīvanmukti*).

These conclusions show how texts and contemplation are intimately intertwined in Śaṅkara's Advaita. Śaṅkara's view of the Upaniṣads as a means of self-knowledge and his understanding of *nididhyāsana* as dependent on Upaniṣadic sentences show a soteriological emphasis on texts, not contemplation. Contemplation and liberation are embedded in the active agency of texts and teacher and not in non-textual practice or cultivation of personal experience. Śaṅkara was aware of serious philosophical problems with Vedāntic interpretations of contemplation as a practice separate from the texts. By Śaṅkara's time, there was a tension internal to Advaita and with other Vedāntic

traditions, such as those of Bhartṛprapañca and Brahmadatta, concerning the relationships of contemplation, textual study, and liberation. We have seen this in our discussions of Maṇḍana Miśra's *Brahmasiddhi*, Śaṅkara's *Upadeśasāhasrī*, and in the views of Sureśvara. Perhaps the single most important example of this tension is the doctrine of the *prasaṅkhyāna* contemplation, in which contemplative practice functions independently of the texts and culminates as an immediate experience of non-duality that is then identified as liberation. As we have seen, Śaṅkara rejects the *prasaṅkhyāna* contemplation for many reasons, but most importantly because it neglects the primacy of the Upaniṣads as the source of *brahmavidyā,* and is an action creating results, a causal process incompatible with the *ātman*'s self-illumination.

Yet Śaṅkara did not dismiss contemplation outright and sought a harmonious interaction between texts and contemplation in his system. This effort is evident in his removal of *nididhyāsana* from the domain of action and results, and into the domain of self-knowledge in order to alleviate any opposition between textual study and contemplation. In fact, I believe the interpretation most faithful to Śaṅkara is one of understanding *nididhyāsana* as an advanced mode or limb of *śravaṇa*, designed to internalize the external structure and content of sacred texts. I speculate that it is an ancillary form of textual study whose necessity is contingent upon certain conditions, namely problematic *saṁskāra*s. For advanced practitioners without obstructions, *nididhyāsana* happens naturally and spontaneously without any willed effort. Śaṅkara's orientation blurs the differences of reading, listening, teaching, contemplation and their respective experiences to the texts alone.

Śaṅkara's interpretation of *nididhyāsana* presents an important perspective on the relationship of text and practice. Contemplation cannot be reduced to an independent intellectual endeavor or some form of additional practice. Śaṅkara emphasizes the primacy of scriptural texts and reduces contemplation and experience to the texts alone. In Śaṅkara's view one should not make a distinction of texts and their performance. His Advaita system makes no room for a difference between the specialist in the study of sacred texts and the specialist in spiritual practice. In fact we should not project any such distinction upon Śaṅkara's Advaita because he repeatedly rejects the notion. For him, these two specialists must be one and the same, for understanding the texts is the only direct self-reflexive way of discovering the *ātman*. It is Advaita's most important spiritual pursuit. Śaṅkara's interpretation conflicts with the views of some neo-Vedāntins such as Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, who made a distinction between the textual specialist and spiritual specialist and emphasized the latter.

Properly understanding Śaṅkara's *nididhyāsana* may come down to our own notions of what constitutes a text. Contemporary scholars and some classical Advaitins view texts as something static, bound by the written word or what is spoken between teacher and student. However, we may better understand Śaṅkara if we drop our presuppositions about what a text is. I believe Śaṅkara holds an orthodox yet fluid interpretation of what constitutes the Upaniṣadic texts. On one hand the Upaniṣads are a set of sacred texts that are eternal, unchanging, fixed, and carefully handed down through the generations. On the other hand, even though the words stay the same, he sees them in a dynamic relationship with the student's progression along the Advaita path. In this

conception, the boundaries of the text expand beyond the fixed written words to include the spoken word, logical reflection, and the internal process of *nididhyāsana*. Furthermore, Śaṅkara views the texts from both a conventional and absolute perspective. In the latter perspective he appears to identify the texts with their self-knowledge content, as *brahman* itself.

Rather than try and force *nididhyāsana* into our conceptions of a text, we may better understand Śaṅkara by expanding our notion of texts. In fact, I would speculate that for Śaṅkara the Advaita practitioner's experience of texts naturally expands as he or she studies and contemplates self-knowledge. At first, in early stages of study, there may appear to be a clean distinction between texts and contemplative practice, but this boundary recedes the more one progresses. From one standpoint, that of the liberated person, one may dismiss texts, the proverbial boat that helps one cross a river and is then no longer useful; however, if we read Śaṅkara as identifying the Upaniṣads with their meaning, and this meaning is none other than *ātman*, we may claim that texts not only encompass contemplation, but stretch in their identification with liberation and *brahman*.

I have argued for a certain interpretation of *nididhyāsana*, which is coherent with Śaṅkara's broader philosophy; however, Śaṅkara did not systematically detail his understanding of *nididhyāsana*. It is no great surprise then that various conflicting interpretations arose among post-Śaṅkara Advaitins. Why did Śaṅkara not describe contemplation more clearly? Śaṅkara was concerned with contemplation, for as we have seen, in a few important places he discusses it and rejects the views of opponents. Perhaps he figured it should arise spontaneously for the advanced practitioner and does

not require extensive elaboration. Or he may have refrained from discussing it in order to maintain an emphasis on *śravaṇa* and to avoid the pitfalls of the *prasaṅkhyāna* theory. But overall there is still a startling and conspicuous absence of discussions about *nididhyāsana* in his writing, given the magnitude of his corpus.

Śaṅkara's relative silence raises concerns and issues. He leaves open a number of questions about contemplation. He is ambiguous about the specifics of *nididhyāsana* practice and does not set out a clear definition or how it functions in his soteriology. He does not label the types of self-knowledge encountered in the Advaitin's study, such as a distinction between propositional and non-propositional self-knowledge. We have also repeatedly seen problems in trying to formulate a chronology of listening, contemplation, and liberation for his view. Does the wise person who practices *nididhyāsana* already possess *brahmavidyā*? Is repetition possible prior to *brahmavidyā*? Is there any further requirement for contemplative repetition if one has immediate *brahmavidyā*? Does instrumentality for *brahmavidyā* necessarily lie in the Upaniṣads and not in the individual's mind, or in both? All too often scholars and Advaita practitioners accept stock answers for such questions, but upon closer inspection these answers evade our grasp due to Śaṅkara's silence or to subtle non-committal shifts in his writing.

I interpret Śaṅkara's silence as meaningful and intentional. His writing is vast, yet he carefully chooses the extended discussions. I think Śaṅkara likely recognized the many ambiguities, paradoxes, and unsolvable issues in Advaita formulations of *jīvanmukti* and thus of *nididhyāsana*. Furthermore, Śaṅkara is aware that the Advaitin is trying to solve a problem that does not truly exist according to the philosophy. In a

sense, the whole pursuit of liberation is illogical. It is therefore questionable whether he believed the underlying theory of a contemplative approach to an apparent delusional problem must be logically watertight. While we can formulate a picture of *nididhyāsana's* practice, function, and relationship to textual study, it also holds a non-verbal and non-rational position in Śaṅkara's soteriology. Perhaps we may conclude that the meaning and Śaṅkara's interpretation of *nididhyāsana* is fluid in order to help us embrace the complexity and paradoxes we encounter in attempting to bridge non-dual metaphysics and lived practice. It is fluid, in that our view of *nididhyāsana* changes depending on shifting perspectives. From one perspective it looks like a meditation practice, but from another it is a mode of textual study. From one perspective it may be propositional knowledge and from another it may be direct *brahmavidyā*. From the self-ignorant standpoint *nididhyāsana* is practiced before liberating *brahmavidyā*, but from the standpoint of the liberated person *brahmavidyā* is present during *nididhyāsana*. Allowing our formulation of *nididhyāsana* to shift depending on context and perspective is I think the most appropriate understanding of its place in Śaṅkara's thought.

In my opinion many of the puzzles and unanswered questions that I have raised about *nididhyāsana* are intrinsic to Śaṅkara's view, and perhaps some are intentional. Future research might help us speculate on possible solutions to these puzzles, but it is unlikely that any definitive solutions are forthcoming. However, the unresolved questions regarding Śaṅkara's *nididhyāsana* invite further study. There are many avenues for future research to help us better understand *nididhyāsana* in the post-Śaṅkara Advaita traditions, beginning with Padmapāda and Sureśvara. The later Advaita traditions tried to

solve problems and ambiguities and simultaneously raised more questions about *nididyāsana*, especially in the realm of an increasingly sophisticated epistemology. As of yet, there are no substantial studies that adequately address the conceptions of *nididhyāsana* in the later Vivaraṇa and Bhāmatī schools, let alone an exhaustive discussion of the debates about it between these two schools. There is also a scarcity of any ethnographic fieldwork on Advaita practice. How are different Advaitins approaching *nididhyāsana* in their practice today? How and why might these practices differ among different lineages and in different geographic areas? What are the political and social forces that have influenced interpretations of *nididhyāsana* in classical and neo-Advaita? Such future research would provide a clearer understanding of *nididhyāsana* in past and present Advaita traditions. Historical and indological studies are only one set of research possibilities. The specialized study of *nididhyāsana* connects to many broader issues in the study of religion and philosophy. Using the epistemological and metaphysical framing assumptions from the Indian material may help us to approach Western positions in novel and fruitful ways, and may facilitate a better reflexive understanding of our own presuppositions.

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Vita

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